デスマーチからはじまる異世界狂想曲
愛七
Illustration・shri
2

5-1. Journey (1)

Satou's here. Typically in a game, it's walking in the beginning, carriage in the middle and teleportation or airship in the endgame, getting convenient as it goes.

A friend said that going on an adventure in a carriage is miserable.
Since this isn't an adventure, I guess it's okay to enjoy myself right?

◇

The wagon makes clattering and rumbling noise as it travels through the highway between hills.

"Uuu~."
"Nya~."

Whenever small animals like rabbits and rats show up near the bushes, Pochi and Tama react as if they're going to jump out of the wagon. Every time it happened, Liza seized the two by their waists. Alhough the wagon is only about 20 Km/H fast, so they won't get hurt even if they jump out.

"Pochi, Tama, you'll fall if you lean over too much, sit on the back of the coachman's stand."

"Yes nano desu."
"Ay~."

The two reply with good answers and place themselves on the left and right sides of the coachman's stand.
Though it's probably only until they find something else.

The winds are slightly cold, but since it's cloudless the warmth from the sunlight is pleasant.

After we got out of Seryuu city for a while, we came into a forest, or rather, a gathering of branching thickets. We came out of it after 1 hour, and now we're advancing through what you'd call hilly areas.
I could see shepherds herding their sheep on the other side of the hills sometimes. I've only seen goat-made products in the city, but there are shepherds too huh.

Gakon. Gakokokon.

The wagon shakes as the wheels are climbing up. From behind, I'm hearing Lulu's small shriek, and Arisa's abusive languages, but I'll pretend that I didn't hear it and let it carried away by the wind.

Since the highway is made to avoid the hills, it's winding. The ground is not paved with stone pavements, the soils are bare. As a result, the wheels stumble into rough spots several times. Although the horses are just moving along the course of the road by themselves, it's the coachman's job to fine tune the wagon.
Even though I'm supported by skill, due to the lack of my actual experience I couldn't avoid them all.

Arisa climbs above Pochi's head and shows her face from behind (me).

"I'd love for you to drive more carefully~."
"Don't be unreasonable to a novice coachman."

I put aside Arisa's protest irresponsibly. Pochi looks troubled with Arisa who nests on top of her head.
Oh, Pochi is counterattacking, she catches Arisa's hands and playfully bites it.

"W, wait Pochi, stop that. The sleeves will get sticky with drools~."
"Hamumu, nyanoresu~."

Arisa who pulls her arm back and Pochi who hounds her rush toward the luggage rack near the coachman's stand.
"Don't get rowdy now~", I warn them lightly. The wagon is shaking, it'd be

bad if they fall.
Tama who sees Arisa and Pochi playing around looks raring to go.

Ah, Tama also participates in the war.
Since Tama isn't suited for patience or perseverance, I guess this can't be helped.

◇

The trip is more relaxed than I thought it'd be. Since this is a fantasy world, I thought that we would encounter some monsters or something, but there weren't any even up to now.
I tried searching in wide area but there were no dangerous animal or monster. At most it was just foxes. I spot packs of wolves sometimes but they're 10 kilometers away at the edge of the forest earlier, so there's no need to be vigilant for the time being.

When I went on a date with Zena-san back then, she said that the military is doing practice by regularly eliminate dangerous animals and monsters around the perimeter of Seryuu city. This is probably thanks to that.

Liza who seemingly couldn't let the little girls who were still playing around any longer, warns them. I had thought that they should be stopped soon, so it's helpful.

Replacing Liza, Lulu who took refuges on the back of the wagon sitting behind me.
Come to think of it, I haven't talk with Lulu much. Communication is important, let's talk with her properly from now on.

"Lulu, are you fine? You don't have motion sickness or the like right?"
"Y, yes!"

I thought that she wouldn't reply, but quite a surprised voice came out.

Right, she moved behind me silently, so she would be surprised if I call her out without turning my head.

The beastkin girls have high physical abilities and I thought that it's natural, but for Lulu who is just a normal girl, it would be surprising. I've almost replaced my common sense with unreasonableness--- I should be careful.

"You don't have to be so nervous. Just like Arisa--- or rather not, be more like Pochi and the girls who casually interact with me."
"Such things... Since I'm slave, it's unbecoming."

Lulu lets out a faint voice that sound as if she's about to disappear, seem like this will need some time.
For the time being, I should get her to get accustomed with having conversations with me.

"Lulu, do you have anything you like?"
"I like taking care of Arisa."

Is she a siscon? No, it's probably just a normal sisterly love.
I'm reluctant, but I continue to talk about Arisa as the topic. To clear away her reserved attitude, it's important to continue the conversations no matter the topic.

"You really love your younger sister."
"I sometimes question who is the older one."
"Certainly, she really doesn't act like a 11 years-old."
"Arisa is a genius since she was a child."
"How was she?"

Rather than genius, it was because she had the experience from her previous life, but I'd better not talk about it huh?
After that, Lulu continues to brag about Arisa happily until noon. Humans are good at speaking about the thing they love, this is no different even in another world.

Lulu who talks about Arisa, looks very happy. Her eyes are sparkling, her cheeks faintly blush too. Her face which is normally that of beautiful girl, gets even more beautiful. I'm scared that I would fall into a dangerous world (lolicon) if I'm careless.

I could hear Arisa who seems to be in agony for being praised very highly behind but maybe because she understands my intention, it doesn't seem like she would interrupt Lulu's story.

When the wagon goes on a straight line for a while I look at the luggage rack. Arisa is writhing on the floor while Pochi and Tama are mimicking her by lying down on the sides. Noticing my gaze, the two look toward here while still on their mimicking position. I gesture that it's nothing, and then they resume to imitate Arisa happily.
Yup, peaceful is nice~.

Then, Lulu continues to talk about Arisa for nearly one hour after that.

◇

Let's change the story since Lulu's voice started to become hoarse.
Of course, I'm ready to hear Lulu's talk about Arisa anytime. Let's make Arisa participate if I need to punish her.

Just as I try to get the timing, I hear a cute growl from the side.
Confirming on the menu, it's about time for lunch. We could eat in the wagon as it continues but I want to check on the condition of the horses fixtures so I decide to take a break for the lunch. It's not like we are in a rush, and we won't reach town for two or three days anyway.

According to the map, there's a boulders formation just up ahead, so I pick that place for the break.

"Let's have a lunch soon."

"Meal~?""Meat nanodesu!"

Pochi and Tama answer faster than Lulu who has become red on my side.
Jumping from back of the wagon, a girl shows her face.

"Shall I cut some cheeses and breads if we're going to eat in the wagon?"

Liza, weren't you just keeping watches on the back of the wagon?
Arisa who has revived follow after Liza. Her voice has become hoarse while her hair is in disorder, she's a bit scary.

"We have a nice weather today, let's eat like we're having a picnic~."
"That's right. Looks like that there's a boulders formation up ahead, let's take a break for 1 hour there."

After that we advance through the road for awhile, in the middle of the way we get out of the highway and climb a hill. The carriage shakes and loses its speed because the ground is underdeveloped grasslands. I advance the wagon carefully.

Soon, we can see the boulders.
Each and every one of them is quite big. The boulders are about 2 meter high and nearly 7 meter wide.

I stop the wagon near on the side of a boulder.
I descend from the coachman's stand, and help Lulu to get off it.

Arisa jump toward me while saying, "Tou!", like some kind of hero, I avoid her.

"Wait~ Aren't your treatment toward me getting worse?"

"That's not true at all. You're cute Arisa.", I answer half-heartedly, and lowered the fixture of the wagon.

"You didn't put your heart into it! You'll stray off the path of delinquent

soon~"

Your vocabularies reeks of Showa era like usual.
Pochi and Tama also imitate Arisa, "Tou~?""Tou nano desu~", they're jumping while saying that. It's good that they didn't imitate the pose.

I release the yokes on the horse and tie the veins on the wagon. I check on the fixture of the wagon, and it seems that the horses bodies don't have scratch so it's fine.

Liza comes down with a barrel filled with water, I give it to the horses. I'll give them the priority because they're the ones who work the hardest today.

"Liza, prepare something that's easy to make like sandwich or salad."

I ask Liza for the meal.
Since it's bad to only have Liza to do it, let's try to see whether Lulu or Arisa can cook.

"Unfortunately, Arisa's female power level isn't high enough for cooking."

Arisa said so in monotone while looking toward the day after tomorrow. Is she feeling guilty? I won't say such old-fashioned thing like a woman have to be able to cook, okay.

"I've no experience in cooking, but I could do things like peeling fruits or making tea."
"Then, Lulu will act as Liza's assistant. Help her cooking by following her instruction."
"Yes! I will do my best."

I ask Lulu to help Liza. I wonder if she's happy for being helpful, I feel like she could get her voice out more around me like she has accustomed to me. I wonder if it's too early to think that?

Should I ask Pochi and Tama to collect firewood?

When I look at the two, they're exuding atmosphere like they're about to run toward the meadow. Their faces turn to me, but their ears twitches every time the bushes make sound.
Let's occasionally let them play appropriate for their age~.

"Private Pochi! Private Tama!"
"Ay!"
"Yes nanodesu!"

Good answers.

"I will assign you two a mission! Check the security around the perimeter of the boulders!"
"Ay!""Desu!"

The two begin to run like arrows. Let's remind them, "I'll call you two back when the meal is ready, so don't go too far~", so they won't overdo it.
I guess I'll make Arisa to collect the fuel.

"Arisa, gather things like dead leaves and firewood near the bushes around here."
"Kay~."

I direct Arisa as I give salts to the horses. Arisa who doesn't have any particular complaint go to gather the firewood while singing some minor anime-like songs.

5-2. Journey (2)

Satou's here. Hiking is nice, isn't it. When you're surrounded by nature, fully inhaling the scents of the trees and the plants, you completely forget about all the unpleasant affairs at work.

◇

After I've finished taking care of the horses, I begin to compound for deodorants behind the wagon. I want to do something about the intense smells of the goat leather and wool.

During compounding, Liza come to ask if the meal is fine without soup since the firewood isn't enough. It's cold, and the black bread without the soup would be too hard.
I catch a sight of the Light Hot Plate beside me which I've used to heat water for compounding.
I decided to use this to help for cooking. After heating the soup with this, you could put the burning firewood until it's boiled. I'll leave the magic supply for Light Hot Plate to Arisa.

Still, I didn't think that gathering for fuel would be this hard. I should have bought them in Seryuu city.
I'll take out scrap woods from the Storage if we get in a pinch. The fact that the Item Box could only store item with particular size is a bottleneck.

◇

I, who have been making deodorant behind the wagon, could smell the nice aroma from the soup. The finished deodorant is in the form of a white powder. I put it in a small bag and it seems that you used it by mixing it together with the smell source.

I take out the goat leathers and wools from the storage and put them inside the Item Box in a small sack with the deodorant. Since they were too many to get inside, I leveled up the Item Box skill level to 4.

Liza comes to say that the meal is ready exactly right after I've finished my business even though she probably didn't watch me.

Now then, since the meal is ready I should call Pochi and Tama back.
I call them in loud voice.

Yup, let's buy a whistle when we get to a town.
I do have whistles in my Storage but it'd be disastrous if I blow it and make a kaijuu or an angel appear, so I won't.

"A prey nano desu~."

Pochi comes back while boastfully presenting a rabbit on her hand. The ears are short for a rabbit. According the AR, it's called Short-eared Rabbit. Pochi is dirtied with grass and mud from the top of her head to her foot, but she's smiling nicely.

I relay the rabbit I've received to Liza.
I praise Pochi while stroking her head. Since I can't let her have a lunch like she is, I put water to a bucket and wash her face and arms with it. I've made this policy from the time we were in the labyrinth before we had meals, so when she's presented with the water bucket, she's splashing the water around. Lastly, she shakes her head to remove the water without using a towel. This habit of her is irreparable it seems.

"Meat~? I've brought it~."

This time it's Tama who has come back, her voice comes from behind.
I wonder what did Tama catch? Is it a bird~?

"Meat! ...nano desu?", Pochi tilt her head in puzzle midway.

When I turn back, the thing that Tama holds is an about 80-cm high rat... or not. The AR shows that it's a rat-man.
The rat-man seems to be unconscious, but at least he's still alive.

"Tama, please let that one go."

While looking a bit sad, Tama says, "Prey~ No good~?", she's coming here while tilting her head.
I almost allow it involuntarily, but let's not eat men. I should teach her about this gradually.

"You'll hurt your stomach, so no."
"Aye~."

Tama begins to spin on spot while still holding the rat-man. Then, she throws the rat-man across the meadow.

Oioi, that was too wild no matter how you look at it.

The rat-man has its HP decreased by a little, but it seems to be alive.
Since we treated him too rough, I decided to check if he has any external wounds. Before that, I scold Tama properly.

The rat-man doesn't seems to have any injury. According to AR, he doesn't have any skill, age 2. As expected of rats, they grow fast. He's grasping something that look like a ball of mud on his hand, but, since I have no interest on it, I leave it alone. It's probably this child's boxed lunch.
Since he only seems to have fainted, I put him on a meadow a bit away from our camp. I put several fruits beside him as a remuneration for the trouble.

On the other hand, Liza has quickly dismantled the rabbit that Pochi caught and she is grilling it now. The entrails that has been washed then properly cut into tiny pieces by Liza, and fried together with some herbs.
By the way, we're using a dead tree from the other side of the boulder found by Tama as the fuel.

"My stomach is hungry nodesu~."
"Copycat is bad nano desu~."
"Meat~ nano desu~."

Arisa demands for lunch while imitating as Pochi. Pochi protests at her, Tama follows suit.
...this is slightly amusing nanodesu.

Since the rat-man doesn't seem like he'll wake up, we decided to begin our meal.

Liza holds out the biggest piece of meat.
I pass it to Pochi because she's the MVP this time. The second biggest one is given to Tama. She was no good with the prey, but she played an active role in securing the firewood.

The meat of the rabbit is tender and delicious. I don't know if whether this is because of Liza being good at cooking or the fresh ingredient, but good food is good food.
I'm offered the herb fried entrails, but since the meat is enough, I decline.

Kasakasa.

Even if I don't look at the direction of the sounds, I know from the radar that the rat-man who has awakened runs away. When I check on it later, the fruits has been properly taken away.

◇

I'm enjoying a tea break with Liza and Lulu after the meal.
Lulu pours me the tea. She was taught in the royal court even if it was just a small country, so the tea made by Lulu is on different level than the one I usually drank. Truly delicious.

Seemingly not at all dissatisfied when I praise her, even while acting humble, her face is smiling.

Arisa follows Pochi and Tama along to go on a sightseeing of the boulders. The person itself said, "I'm surveying", of course, but I could only saw pleasure trip on her mind from her tension.

I search the map while enjoying the tea's aroma.

I tried to look for rat-men, but the only rat-man around here is the child earlier. I wonder if he's a lost child?

From the map, there's a hidden village dozen of kilometer away southeast from here, so he's probably a lost child from a rat-man village outside of the earl's territory. Fortunately the lost child is running into the direction of the village, and the dangerous animals are only foxes, so he's probably going to be okay even left alone.

Since I was only searching for monsters' special attacks or level earlier, I had missed the rat-man. There might be thieves too, so I make an adjustment to the search pattern.

Mumumu, there are thieves. Although there is quite a distance, and the highway is separated from the southeast mountain so we probably won't encounter them anytime soon.

Uoh!
When I narrowed it further, red dots begin to rapidly appear on the screen, but there's nothing when I look around.
Normally insects or small animals won't be shown since I've made it OFF by default.

When I face toward the nearby red dot, something is escaping.

Is it a small animal looking for leftovers? If this was a game, then, animals which likely won't be enemies would be excluded from the start. This is

troublesome.
I guess I should exclude anything with level 1 without poison. They won't hurt even if they bite anyway.

Alright, I've excluded anything without poison or special abilities.

Hm~mm, the red dots still isn't decreasing.
No wait, when I look better, are those insects? Mosquito-like insects are flying. Furthermore, they have [Race Characteristic: Blood-sucking]. Right, mosquitoes suck blood, don't they?

Let's put aside this setting only for when we go to mountain or thickets, and exclude anything beside thing with poison in normal situation. I'll do something about creature I see for the first time with AR. If they're level 1 then elimination them is trivial anyway.

◇

When I'm just about to finish the adjustment, I could hear Arisa's voice calling me from the top of the boulder.
How did she climb that up?

"Is there anything?"
"A bit, come up on top of this rock."

Pochi come backs from the back of the boulder while piggybacking Tama.
Apparently, Arisa had made this two to be the stepping stone to go above.

"Arisa is unfair~."
"Pochi also wants to go up nodesu."
<TLN: Yes, this isn't a typo. Pochi occasionally doesn't use 'nano desu' but 'no desu'. I guess it sounds awkward so I'll make it 'nodesu' whenever she does from no own.>

Arisa stretch her arm to reach out, but it's impossible to pull us with one arm. Since the two people looks eager to go on top, I raise them in turn.

Although because I can't find scaffolds for myself, I jump up once to get there at a blind spot of Liza and Lulu.

"See it from here."

I look at the direction where Arisa points at.
I'm seeing collapsed boulders there. What does Arisa want me to see?

"What am I seeing?"
"Mou, look at it properly."

I see. I finally understand what Arisa wants to show.

"Are those stones from shrine's archway (torii)?"
<TLN: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torii>
"I can only make conjectures since they've collapsed, but looks like there are 3 collapsed torii lined up. Maybe there was a shrine here."

I stare at the remains of the torii's stones. I tell Arisa the information from AR.
I thought that they were just traces of megalithic civilizations, but...

"It's a broken Travel Gate."

It's a well-known gimmick for shortcuts when you're traveling in a game. The ones here seems to have been broken since ancient times, so I don't know the how or if it's possible to repair.

Hearing that, Arisa enthusiastically says, "You can fix it?!" but I briefly answer, "Impossible."

It is attractive to have shortcuts like the one from games, but I'd like to refrain from jumping into an unknown location.

I didn't think too much about this before I become the person concerned, but I wonder why games' protagonists could so simple-mindedly go through gates.

It seems that the boulders has magic catalyst properties, they momentarily react when I try to pour it magic. Although I don't want it to end up with, [You've been trapped inside a stone], situation if it malfunction, so I'll stop acting rashly.

◇

Right after we depart, the three little girls went straight to the dreamland. As soon as the wagon started running, they immediately went asleep, probably because they're full. Arisa seems to have lost to her physical limit too.

"Master, could you possibly teach me how to drive the wagon?"
"That's fine, you can sit here."

I agree to Liza's request and make a space on the coachman stand.
It'd be helpful to have people who could drive the wagon beside me, let's teach the other members later.

"Do you want to try it too, Lulu?"
"Yes, I'd like to."

I tried to bring this matter to Lulu who's sitting right behind me, and unexpectedly got a good answer.
I stop the wagon for a moment, and change place with Lulu while holding the reins from the luggage rack. I make Lulu to sit on the coachman stand for training of her together with Liza.

"First, it's about the operation of reins."

I give Liza the reins first.

"Hold the reins a bit loose. But be careful not to make it too loose."

I teach the two like how Yosagu-san taught me.
The two only make minor errors which is normal for people who are tense, and have successfully learned how to drive.

Liza's driving is, though a bit rough, enough for a passing mark. She learned it several hours faster than me, and she's already at the level where she could replace me holding the reins.

>[Education Skill Acquired]

Lulu's driving is, although a bit more unreliable than Liza, fine enough to drive in a flat plain. It'd be fine if she practices it little by little.
While I and Liza watch over her, the wagon driven by Lulu shakes and rumbles while proceeding along the highway between the hills.

5-3. Black Mist

Satou's here. Although we have what we call pending plans, Death March won"t exist in this world if I could just smoothly schedule the minute details beforehand.

◇

"Yiss~ 10 straight victories!"
"It's only Arisa who wins, unfair~ Pochi also wants to win~."
"Tama too~"

I can hear the little girl's voices from behind. The members beside me have been playing the learning cards for about 2 hours.
Since I couldn't really look away, I don't know the details but it seems that Arisa has continue to childishly won.

"Arisa, here's the commemoration for 10 successive victories."
"What is it? A picture book?"
"If you could win that many, then you should be able to read it right?"
"Nnn~ I could probably do."
"Then read it for Pochi and Tama. If they're only studying the learning cards, they would get bored before they remember the letters."
"Aye aye."

At first Arisa was reluctant with the picture book I held out, but she finally consented and spread the book open on the floor.
Still, it's amazing that she could learn it in two days.

Pochi and Tama who were complaining since a while ago, quietly sat and perked their ears when the story began.

With nothing but Arisa reading the picture book as a BGM, the wagon continues advancing.

I ask for a change of coachman since I want to search the location for our campsite today on the map.
I wanted to ask Liza at first, but since she's listening to Arisa's story with a serious face, I ask Lulu instead.

"Please handle the wagon for a bit."
"Yes, master."

I move to the edge of the coachman stand to make space for Lulu. I pass the reins, and want to concentrate on the map but from Lulu's point of view, I'd look like a master who sits beside her in silent... I don't want that.

I migrate to the luggage rack behind and lean my back on the stand.

I immediately look at the map to select the camping ground. Actually, I've thought of a several candidates before we started the journey, but unfortunately the distance we have traveled is shorter than I thought so they're unusable.

There are about 4 hours more before the nightfall.
If we run on this hill for about 3 hours then we'll get closer to the valley between the east and west mountains. According to the book that I've bought from the bookstore back then, [Journey to the Royal Capila], the valley up ahead is a difficult place so I want to make a camp before it.

From what I've seen on the map, there are two locations that could be used for it. The place up ahead has a pond nearby, should I go there?
Something like water spirits or aquatic monsters would usually appear in fantasy setting, but according to the map there are only big frogs there so it should be okay. Big frogs are different from giant frogs from the labyrinth; they're not monsters but just common amphibians.
I wonder where do you draw the line between monsters and normal creatures?

◇

"Master."

I got called out by Lulu who rarely does it.
Since her voice sounds a bit bewildered, I move the map to the edge of my view.

"What's wrong Lulu?"
"U, um, please look at that."

I put my face beside Lulu and look at the place she's pointing at, black mist is moving from one side of the southeast mountain.
Still, it's quite far. She did well to see them.

"Just a bit ago, birds were flying out from the side of that mountain so I was curious. Then, that black mist appeared."
"I wonder what is that?"

That place is beyond the scope of the map. I look hard there.
The AR indicate that it's [Unidentified Flying Insect Monsters]. The details don't appear because this AR is linked with the map.
Appraisal also doesn't work when I try to use it, it's probably outside of its effective range.

"What what? Is there something~?"
"Arisa, continue~?"
"Something nodesu?"

Arisa hangs over me, popping half of her body outside onto the coachman stand. Furthermore, Tama gets on top of Arisa.
I can only imagine this from the presence, but it seems that Pochi also got on them but she fell.

"There's black mist-looking thing over there."

"What's that?"
"It's black, so, Bats?"

Pochi is pressing forwards with her nose first on the narrow space between me and the wagon's canopy. I'd like to tell her that she's going in the reverse direction.
Our eyes meet for a while, then I open some space in front of me and fix Pochi's direction.

"Black lumpy is moving nodesu."

Oh, amazing. She could look at these distances?
If they're flying-type monsters then they could probably get here in 10 minutes.
In a moment, I decided that I'm going to move the wagon into hiding and go outside to see the situation.

"Lulu, call me if we get close to that forest you can see from here."
"Y, yes."

I put Arisa who was riding on my head beside Lulu.

"Arisa, observe the black mist's movement beside Lulu. Since that black mist might be monsters, get ready for battles."

Liza reacts to the word, 'monsters'.

"Pochi, Tama, get ready for battle."
"Aye aye sir~."
"Roger~ nanodesu."

Who taught them those words. Nah, I don't even need to hear it, there's only one truth like always.

Even though I said to get ready to battle, it's only for Liza to hold the spear and for Pochi and Tama to arm the swords. Tama passes pebbles for stone-

throwing from the bag to Pochi.
I thought that her bag looks heavy, so there were those things inside huh.

Liza puts the stones she receives from the two on a small bag tied to her waist.
I take out a crossbow from the box and prepare it. Although I'm just preparing the bowstring. I haven't set the bolts, since it's dangerous.
After I confirmed that Liza and the girls' preparation is complete, I take out 3 additional crossbows and 200 bolts.

◇

"They're coming, a part of that black mist is moving."

It's still not in the map range. When I look at the mountain over Arisa's head, a part of the black mist on the foot of the mountain is certainly moving.
I change place with Lulu to be the coachman and make Arisa and her go back inside the wagon.

After Liza and the girls said that their preparation is complete, I accelerate the wagon.
Arisa asks me in low voice.

"Master, couldn't you see their level with Menu or something?"
"They're out of range. If I could get as close as 10 Km then I would know."
"I wish permission to use magics if the monsters get close."

I give permissions to use magics beside the uniques or the ones she used on the flea market.

"I want to use monster avoiding space (Dodge Field) too. I'd also like to have permission to use Sleep Wave, Sleep Field, and fatigue space <<Ennui Field>>."

I give permission after hearing the description of each magics.

"If the enemies are many, then make them sleep with the sleep magic."
"It's ineffective when the opponents are agitated."

Arisa said while smiling wryly. Then isn't there no meaning for that in battle?

"That's why I want to combo it with <<Ennui Field>>."
"Although you don't use it often, you sure have the knack for it."
"Yep~ But unfortunately, since it doesn't distinguish between friend or foe, it's only for the last resort."
"Don't you have means for direct attack?"
"I could use mind shock bullet (Psycho Ball) and mind shockwave (Shockwave), but at most it could only stun the opponents."
"If you cooperate with Liza, then those two attacks could be quite usable."

I give permissions to use the two magics.
I wonder what those crowds of monsters are chasing?

Monsters emerge from the edge of the map.

"Hexapedal boar (Dash Boar)?"

Rat-men are on the same position as them. The luminous points on the map are moving together. It seems that they're cavalry beasts. Their speed is near 50 Km/H. There are 5 of them.

"What are those?"
"The beasts that the rat-men ride to run away from that black mist."

The dash boars are level 5-6, the rat-men who ride them are level 3-7.
Their positions are bad, if we leave it as it is then they'll come from behind us.

The black mist enters the map range a few minutes late from the cavalries.

"The monsters coming from behind are called Flying Ant, they're only level 2-4 but they're troublesome because of their poison and acid attacks."
"Geh, are the poison and the acid lethal?"
"It seems that the acid burns. The poison is the paralyzing type, so it'd be fine if you're only bitten by one."

That said, if we get carelessly paralyzed, we'd be surrounded to death.
There are already 50 flying ants which have appeared chasing the rat-men.

When our talk is over, the rat cavalries break through the forest 200 meters away from us and cross the highway, missing the hill.
Alright, seems that they won't come here. While apologizing to the horses in my mind, I steel my heart and whip them. Me, Liza and the girls could deal with them, but it'd be dangerous for Lulu and the horses if they catch up.

I can hear loud striking sounds from the other side of the forest. There are 89 in total which chase the rat cavalries.

Let's just let them go past.
My optimistic thought ends when Arisa reports from behind.

"One of them is coming here."

5-4. Flying Ants (1)

Satou's here. A member of society with workaholic tendency, Satou.

It's not like I can't understand when people liken hard workers with ants, but I don't want to get along with dog-sized ants.

◇

I know from the radar that there is one flying ant coming here. Since there is a considerable speed difference, it's just a matter of time before it catches up.

"Lulu, evacuate from the coachman stand. Arisa, are you confident with your aim using the stun magics you mentioned earlier?"
"As long as the range is within 20 meters, it's fine."

I take out a cane from the back of the wagon-actually I take it from the Storage- and give it to Lulu who passes it to Arisa.

"Eh~ It's plain, but it's quite a good cane."

I won't speak of it, after all it's more expensive than Arisa.

"Shoot twice then fall back even if you miss and switch with Liza. Pochi and Tama will cover Liza."
"Kay~."
"I understand, master."

Pochi's and Tama's answers are a bit late.

"Nyu~?"
"Is it okay not to throw the stones?"

Oh yeah, I forgot about the throwing stones. Since I want to confirm the stun

magics type for now, let's keep them as reserves.

"This time it's fine not to throw the stones. I want you to concentrate on the ant which got onto the wagon."
"Aye aye sir~."
"Roger~ nano desu."

The relative distance is under 100 meters.
The other ants are chasing after the rat cavalries who go toward the hill.

50 meters. Lulu who probably feels uneasy is grabbing the cuff of my clothes.

30 meters. The sound of the wings is approaching.

20 meters.

"Mind Shock Wave (Shock Wave)."
"It falls~?"
"Arisa, amazing nodesu."

The ant which got hit by Arisa's attack seems to have fallen onto the ground. Although according to the map, it's still alive. As expected of insects, they're not so soft as to die from crashing.

"The magic knocked it down, but it's not defeated yet. Though it's fine if we could just kill it before it woke up..."

Certainly, it'd want to return to its nest when it wakes up.

"Ants, lots of them nano desu!"
"Guh, it's impossible to link with these numbers~"

Pochi's voice is a bit late compared to the radar which shows red dots swarming here.
They're forming groups with 8 monsters in each of the 4 groups.

"It's a bit too many."
"Yeah, even if I successfully use Shock Wave, it'll probably only affect three of them."
"Can you fire it continuously?"
"I can't, the chants could make it in time, but I can't cancel it until I release the magic power."
"Pochi, Tama, restrain the enemies by throwing stones at both sides. If they come within Arisa's range, switch with her."

I could be the shooter too but it's impossible to leave the reins to Lulu, what should I do.

"It's Tama's tu~rn."
"I won't lose nodesu~."

I look back at the state of the backseat for a bit. Tama and Pochi are throwing stones. Liza supports them to recover their posture after throwing the stones.

"Did it hit~?"
"They're falling nodesu."
"Yosh, you did great, children! Shock Wave!."

It seems that they've shot down the first four enemies, and the radar reflects---following them, the enemies are decreased by four.
There are two enemies who caught up to the wagon from behind, but one of them is skewered by Liza's spear and the other one who jumped inside is skillfully dealt with by Pochi and Tama.
I'm guessing that's what happened from the noisy sounds from behind and the change of luminous points on the radar.

I can't afford to look back yet.
The ants are swarming on both sides of the wagon, I shoot any ants which go ahead on one side with magic pistol while ants which come from the other side get mercilessly kicked by me.
The kicked ant, becomes part of the scenery while scattering in pieces.

◇

The second wave of the ants is disposed with the same flow too.
But it seems that the ants have moderate intelligence, the third and the fourth waves are attacking from the shadow of the thickets on the left.

The ants are flying in parallel on both side of the thickets 300 meters away from us, it seems that they're waiting for chances. The range is not enough for the magic pistol.
I ease the wagon's speed and leave the reins to Lulu.

I take the crossbow leaned against the coachman stand, an put the bolt on the bowstring.
I can see the ants' bodies from the gap of the trees. I aim for the ant on the tail of the queue.

I aim at its future position---

Shoot.

"No matter how you look at it, you're just wasting arrows."

A luminous dot disappear from the radar.

"It's fine as feints. Arisa, I leave you to watch out for the back."
"Hoi!"

While talking, I shoot at the next ant. I can hardly believe it myself, but after this, every nocked arrow hit its target without fail. Along the way, we're about to leave the forested area, but it's too late. Every ant has been shot down before we passed the area through.

◇

"Lulu, it's okay to lower the speed now."
"Y, yes."

I put back the crossbow, and go to receive the reins from Lulu. Maybe because she holds it with all her might, her hands can't come off, I gently take her finger off the reins one by one.

"Sexual Harassment?"
"Not."

I was looking at Lulu's graceful hands, but I change to look at the inside of the wagon.
Arisa is looking here over her shoulder from the very back of the wagon. I don't have anything to feel guilty about, what an impolite girl.
I must tell everyone that the first stage of the battle is complete.

"Everyone, thank you for your hard work, we have successfully repelled the ants it seems."
"What about the ones before this forest area?"
"Seems that they've given up and returned."

I look behind and give everyone words of gratitude. Tama and Pochi are having an argument about the one who defeated the most enemies but Arisa boastfully says "I defeated 7 of them~♪".

"U, um, master... y, your hand."

I turn toward Lulu since I could hear her small voice beside me.
Oops, I've been holding her hand. This is really sexual harrasment then. I separate our hands and apologize to Lulu.
It feels like she's shy about it but doesn't dislike it, it must be my imagination though. I'm not a middle-schooler, I should have limits to misunderstanding.

"Is it fine if you let me be the coachman?"

Lulu asked in modest voice, as a result, I leave Lulu to be the coachman. I sit next to Lulu, open the map, and check on the state of the rat cavalries.

This is bad.

The rat cavalries are reduced to three, but they're going strong.
While bringing along the Flying Ants, they detour the hill by making a big arc.
And with their current course, they will surely cross with this wagon.
I change places with Lulu. I don't want to let Lulu sits on the direction where they will appear.

"The other rat cavalries seem to be coming here while bringing the flying ants. I'm sorry, but prepare for battle once again."
"How many are there?"
"52 ants."

It seems that the rat cavalries have managed to defeat five.
Those rat cavalries show up on top of the hill. I have a feeling that the rat-man with red helmet met eyes with me. The guy's dash boar is larger than the others. Enough to let two people onboard.

That rat cavalry approaches our wagon, and begins to run parallel with it. The other two lower their speeds, seemingly to attract attention of the ants.
When it get beside the wagon, the rat-man lowers his helmet and shows his face, even though he has rat's face it's nihilistically handsome and looks like it's saying something.

"◆◆◆◆! ▼▼▼▼! ●●●●!"

>[Ash-Mouse Tribe Language Skill Acquired]
>[Green Scales Tribe Language Skill Acquired]
>[Elf Language Skill Acquired]

Somehow, I got various languages skills.
After thinking what could happen later, I decided to take the [Elf Language] skill. I raise it to level 3 and activate it.

"Human, words, don't you understand?!"
"Sorry, but, can you quickly get away? I don't want to get involved."

Even though I've purposely learned other language, the Shiga kingdom language came out. I complained back with Elf language, since I'd complain anyway even if I use Shiga language.
Putting me aside, I won't allow our girls to be in danger.

"Oh! You understand Elf language do you, then I have a request!"

Oioi, you're asking now after getting us involved?

"Please take care of the princess. If possible until she gets home, but if you can't then at least until you give her to the same tribe."

After saying that, the red helmet throws someone wrapped in thick coat he has been carrying to here.
I receive her in hurry. It seems that she has fainted.

When I look back, the red helmet has gone back to help the other two fight the ants.
I lay the girl in the wagon and go to very back where Arisa and the girls are.
Even without seeing the battle, their (the cavalries) luminous dots are already gone from the radar.

The red helmet most likely chose to die a honorable death. The girl earlier is probably that much important.
However, reality tramples on such thought.

An ant jumps on Arisa and the girls, and another one jumps on this wagon.

5-5. Flying Ants (2)

Satou's here. Shooting games were popular a long time ago, but I didn't play it. But since my work was related to FPS, I did play them in game shows...

◇

The flying ants formed groups of 8 ants and then start to head toward this wagon.

I pass 4 crossbows to everyone except Lulu who is handling the wagon, and give them a simple lecture for its operation.
Use the lever to pull the bowstring, then put the bolt on the rail and pull the trigger. If you don't think the hitting the target part, it is actually quite simple.

"Take a stance... shoot!"

Matching my signal, the bolts fly. The target is the approaching swarm.

Three ants were shot down. After setting the next bolts, we shoot once again. This time we hit two.

We won't make it for the next volley, but Arisa unleashes Shock Wave as we've arranged before, and shoots down the remaining three.

Because the next group is getting closer than the one before, after shooting one volley of bolts, we decrease their number with Shock Wave, and then, the remaining two ants fall prey to Liza's spear and my zero-distance bolt shot.

"Master, do you have any MP recovery medicine?"

I give three of it to Arisa. After receiving it, Arisa puts one hand on her waist and gulps down the energy drink in one breath.

"The next one is dangerous."

Yes, for the next wave, three groups are attacking at once. We are already shooting with bolts, but it doesn't look like they're decreasing. The saving grace is the fact that there's still some distance.

"Please give permission for me to use Over Boost. I could somehow do something to half of them."

During the pause of our conversation, Arisa gulps down another medicine.

"I understand, I permit you."
"Thank you, I love you."

Please don't raise a strange flag.
Arisa's light joke is a bit stiff.

"Over Boost!"

Matching Arisa's Command Words, light violet aura gusts forth.
She holds the long cane, and begins to chant orally.
The violet aura are forming great numbers of magic circle on the center of the long cane.

"■■■ ■■■■■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■ Shock Wave"

An invisible shock wave tramples down upon the swarms of ants. The ants who got hit directly, different from what happened until now, die while spilling their bodily fluids from their heads. The other ants who got hit by the aftermath wave are also spinning around until they fall.
Even though Arisa said half, in actuality, all three of the groups become unable to fight. As expected of unique skills.

I gently catch Arisa who blacks out.

"My eyes are spinning~."

"Round and round~ nano desu."
"Perhaps this is the effect of Arisa's magic, I feel a bit dizzy."

The three seems unable to stand due to the after effect. I leave Arisa to Liza, and decide to clean up the remaining five ants which were late.
I have Lulu to stop the wagon.

"Pochi, Tama, pull the strings of the crossbows."
"Aye.""Desu."

The two looks exhausted, but they're doing their best to set up the crossbows.

Whenever I shoot the crossbow, I exchange it with the loaded one from Pochi or Tama.
This feels like Nagashino.
<TLN: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Nagashino>

After clearing the swarms up, I fire at high angle aiming at the fainted ants by confirming their position on the radar. I tried to mimic the protagonist from a manga I read long ago, but I didn't think that it would really hit.
Because I have no scope, I shoot continuously at the relative position where the enemies are crowding while learning the fine-tune. Even if the hit rate is no more than 20%, it should be enough.

Several of the ants who got shot down in the beginning are still alive, but it's impossible to hit enemies who are two kilometers away after all. The bolts can't reach them.

◇

We're taking a short break to quench our and the horse's thirsts.

"It's tiring but it's good that everyone is safe."
"Tir~""ring nodesu."

"Arisa still isn't coming to, is she alright?"
"She'd be fine after a night's sleep."

Seen from the AR, Arisa's stamina and magic power which have became zero are gradually getting restored.
Lulu is wiping her sweats with a wet towel.

"Liza and the girls, please collect magic cores, stingers and poison glands."
"The stinger is clear, but I wonder which part is the poison gland."

Since it's hard to explain it, I demonstrate to them by dismantling an ant and show the location of poison gland.

"Put the stingers in this bag and the poison glands in this container. It's enough to just collect 5 of each. Please take care not to get poisoned while doing it."

The remaining ants far in the distance seem to be withdrawing, the dots are decreasing on the map.

I entrust the wagon to Lulu, while I'm compounding several [Antidote: Flying Ant] from the poison glands as the raw materials. One of them could be made into five antidotes.

I lower the "Princess" the red helmet left from the wagon, and put her beside me while I'm compounding. I could put her on the bare ground, but then it'd feel like I'm abusing a child so I spread a sheet on the ground for her.

"Master, Arisa has awoken."
"Wait, no~ Didn't I say that you should tell 『Arisa isn't waking up.』 to master, and guide him to give me MP recovery medicine by mouth~."

It's really Arisa-like, but what are you doing exposing your own evil intention.
Since she did her best today, let's pardon her with just a forehead poke.

Arisa come from inside the wagon borrowing on Lulu's shoulder. She opens her arm and says, "Help me down", so I help her to get down.
Sure enough, she clings on my neck when she's getting down-- That's a feint, her real aim is to kiss me.

I barely succeed on avoiding her holding my ground, and hit her with porehead poke α. There's no meaning to the α.

"Auu, love is painful."
"Yes yes, I love you Arisa."

Looking at the wagon, Lulu also shyly stretches her arms. She's probably inspired by Arisa.
For Lulu who rarely shows her spoiled side, I gently hold her to get down. Of course I did not hug her tight.
However, I'd like you to stop staring at me so sheepishly. I feel like I would forget the age differences.

"By the way, what is this? Is she something you got from the rat-tan?"

Rat-tan... she means the red helmet right. That's quite a cute nickname.
<TLN: Rat-tan = Nezu-tan in romaji>

"The red helmet said that she's a princess."
"Oh, a princess you said! Even though you have beauties from various races waiting for you, now you even want to add the rat princess into your harem! This is why a man is so!"

You reeks of acting.

"M, master..."

Huh? By any chance, did Lulu take Arisa's words seriously?

"I, I'll also do my best to get your favor."
"Yes, yes, you're cute Lulu. But let's talk about favor after 5 years while

refining yourself to be a woman."

Lulu's tension is strange, I wonder if this is an after effect of the battle. I unintentionally answer her like to Arisa.
Lulu puts both her hands on her cheeks, and she is twisting her body. It's cute, but what do I do now.

"We're~""Back~"
"We have come back, master."

The three came back at the right timing. There are 5 poison glands inside the container. The magic cores are plentiful inside the bag. And--

"Why are there a lot of stingers?"
"Yes, master had said that it's enough to collect 5 of them, but I wondered if it's possible to make disposable spears from them so I collected more."
"I see, let's make it next time."
"Yes! Thank you very much."

I likely will forget this, so I make a memo. If I forgot this kind of promise, it would gradually worsen our relationship.

Moreover, Pochi and Tama collected some parts of the red helmet and the rat cavalries equipments. There are no remains of the corpses, and the armor worn by the rat cavalries beside the helmet's were broken so they left it as it is. Also, I forgot about the recollection of bolts, but it seems that they have collected all the bolts besides the broken one.
Liza laments greatly at the fact that there is no meat left from the dash boars.

The "Princess" entrusted by the red helmet still hasn't awoken yet.

Since beasts might possibly gather at the ants' remains, we go ahead several kilometers with the wagon.

The camping ground is an open space with a small pond nearby. Lulu is really afraid with places without a pond. It may be some kind of trauma.

◇

After I've finished taking care of the horse, I'm reading books while drinking the teas brought by Lulu who came during the break of cooking.

I'm skim reading the travel journals I bought back then by unfolding them in the menu. Since I don't want to look like I've gone senile, I open the introductory for life magic book wide turning it vainly.
It's probably better to read normal books, but it's more convenient to use the Menu because I could take memos and search for similar items.

I'm starting to smell a delicious aroma from dinner Liza and Lulu are cooking. They're making bean soup for today's dinner at my request.

"Oo~i""Preys~""We've caught it nodesu~"

The three girls who went hunting come back. I hope that they're not bringing fairies or something~
I slide the book sideway and look at the voices. With Arisa in the lead, Tama and Pochi are holding wild boars-- Of course, it's the four-footed ones-- high up.

It seems that they also hunt the ants which had fainted from the Shock Wave on the ants remains site.

"Master, please taste this."

Lulu brings a small bowl with soup inside.
Arisa said "Why only master, unfai~r", but she lost interest after being told that it's a bean soup and went to dismantle the boars with Liza.

I taste it. Yup, it tastes good thanks to the peppers I've bought from the high-class restaurant.

"It's delicious, I'll be enjoying the dinner."
"Yes! I'll work hard to help."

Lulu's expression has become quite natural.
I feel warm and fluffy now, but the the rat-men's "princess" who is beside me awaken.

5-6. The Rat Princess

Satou's here. Princesses are often present in fairy-tales. But don't you think that there are a lot of suffering princesses?
At least, I'd like it if they end up in happily ever after.

◇

"Have you come to?"

I asked gently while feeling relieved. However, the girl takes a leap to distance herself from me. No, she tried to but because of her anemia she got her feet tangled and tumbled over.

"...Where is Mize?"

I don't know that name, but I could only think one person.

"Is that the red helmet from the rat-man cavalries?"
"Yes."

Although she's right to be on guard, she sure is a taciturn girl.

"After entrusting you to us, he went to bravely fight the monsters... and died."
"It can't be..."

I hesitated for a bit whether to tell a lie to prevent her from getting shocked, but I decided to tell her the truth.
Her face went pale, she must be shocked.

"I am Satou. A traveling merchant. May I ask your name?"

I can see it with AR, but it's proper to introduce yourself to start a conversation.

"...Mia."

A short answer came out after a beat of silence.
Hu~m, it's difficult in quite different way than Lulu.

"Princess-sama, have awaken~"
"Ah, her name is Mia it seems."
"Eh~, I'm Arisa. Nice to meet you, Mia."

Arisa is dumbfounded after introducing herself and looked at Mia's face.

"What is the meaning of this, I wonder?"

Arisa is coming to me. Does she not use Status Check?

"What do you want to ask, say it."

Arisa takes a deep breath.

Inhales.

Exhales.

Inhales again.

"Why is it an elf!"

Arisa said so while pointing at the pale pointed ear of Mia.
Still, I don't think you need to be affected to this degree, right?

"It wasn't the rat-men's princess?"
"It's your fault that you did not properly check on it."

Certainly I thought that I was mistaken when I received her. Although, that's why I took the elf language in the first place. I conversed with Mia in elf language too, did Arisa not hear it?

"Kuh, even though I've made her a special cheese platter..."

I thought the saying that rats like cheese is just a folklore. Wasn't it the fault of western animations.

"Oh well. More importantly, let's eat!"

Arisa pull Mia's hand to make her forcibly stands up.

"If you're hungry, you'll just end up getting even more depressed, let's eat a lot and cry a lot! That's the best memorial service for the departed."

Those are some good words coming from Arisa. I have a feeling that she quoted it from somewhere, but I won't make fun of it.
Mia is overwhelmed by Arisa's vigor, and she take a seat for the meal.
I interpret for the two of them while walking together.

◇

I understand this after we've talked for a bit, even though Mia can't talk in Shiga language, she can understand the rough meaning of it.
Thanks to that I could finish the meal without having to become an interpreter for the little girls.

From the AR, I know Mia's stat, her age is 130 years old. A woman. Level 7. Her skills are, [Water Magic], [Bow], [Spirit Seer], those three. Her titles are, [Maze's Master], and [Little Child of Boluenan Forest]. Her true name is Misanalia Boluenan. I think that her nickname should be Lia, is it because of a custom of the elves?
Mazes huh. Are those different from labyrinths?

From her appearance, she looks to be midway between Arisa's and Lulu's age. Her breast is even more humble compared Arisa-- for Mia's sake I won't

talk more than this.
Her hair is light turquoise almost blue rather than green. Her pupils are beautiful emerald greens. Her skin is white, and her body is thin to the point of almost looking unhealthy.

Still, I'm worried whether I'm cursed with a spell that makes me draw little girls.

Mia is eating only vegetables while avoiding meats since a while. The meats that she refused are shrewdly taken by Tama. From the opposite side, Pochi is swapping her vegetables to Mia's plate.

If you're picky with your foods, you won't grow big you know?

The one I'm most worried about, Liza, is intoxicatedly chewing on the wild boar's leg meat, she's not paying attention to her surrounding. I'll leave her alone.

Lulu is busy acting as a waitress. Since Arisa is taking care of her, even while Lulu is busy, she's still properly eating.

"Boar meat is delicious~"
"Meat stuck on bones is good nodesu."
"Mia too, do eat without refrain."
'Meat, I dislike.'
"She dislikes meat she said."
"Arara, how very elf-like."
'I am an elf.'
"Lulu, don't give her only vegetables, please cut some fruits too."
'I like pears.'
"She likes pears she said."

Mia's replies were shorts, but she did what she could to establish communication with the little girls.

◇

After finishing our meal, everyone is drinking teas made by Lulu.
Since Pochi and Tama don't seem like they have interest with tea, they're enjoying an after-meal nap on the sheet. Liza and Lulu are doing the clean-up.

I search for [Bornean Forest] in the travel journal book. It's located south from here, adjacent to the a Shiga kingdom duke's territory. It's a bit off from the route to the Labyrinth city from here, but it's not like we could not go to it.

I'll be fine with escort her there, but it's probably a good idea to check the reason why those ants were chasing her. I don't think that it was just a chance encounter when it was that many.

I ask her in elf language. I'm careful as to not make it sounds like a cross-examination.

"Mia, I have a few things to ask you about, is it fine?"
"What?"

"Could I hear the reason why those large swarms of flying ant were chasing you?"
"...They came to capture."
"Capture Mia?"
"Yes."

Mia answer my questions bit by bit. I feel bad for everyone else, but I'll translate the informations I got from the conversation to them later.

"Why did the ants want to catch you?"
"Because it's necessary."

Well, yeah, of course.

If I don't plan my question better, I won't get the answer I want.

"Who is the one who need you?"
"....a magician."

It's a good news that it's not the same kind as wagahai-kun.
<TLN: 'Wagahai' is how the demon back then refer to itself, pretty funky way to do so in Japanese.>

"Do you know why you're needed?"
"For the maze."

Still, mazes huh, this is a world with a lot of mysterious words huh. Her title is master of maze after all, I wonder if the maze can't function if she's not there.

"Where is the maze located?"
"...mountain."
"Is it near here?"
"Probably."

It's probably where that mist, or rather ants, came from.
Although, it's not like I intend to go there.

"What is that magician doing in the maze?"
"Making things like ants or puppets."

So the ant was made huh, they're like the subspecies of the ants from the labyrinth. By puppets, is it the moving dolls?
Nevertheless, even though I don't know for what reason the magician is gathering forces, it's probably not for something good. Judging from the position, it's to wage war with Seryuu city maybe?

"Do you know what they are made for?"
"...don't know."

Mia's face which had became red after taking the meal is turning pale. It looks like she knows but she doesn't want to tell or remember.

"Do you think that magician will come after you?"
"Surely coming."

That would be so huh.
That mean I can't just push her to the manager of the worker guild. If possible, I would have wanted to.

Even if war breaks out, I don't think that Seryuu city armed forces would lose, but the flying monsters might indiscriminately attack the girls I know somewhere in the city. It's painful to even think about it.
Should I become the silver masked hero, persuade or force the magician to give up on the maze, and push the magician to the soldiers on the gate of seryuu city? I feel like the plan is too simplistic.

Lastly, let's ask what the person herself want.

"Mia, Mize-san asked you me to take you to your home or to the same tribe. Which one do you wish?"
"...I want to go home."
"I understand."

"Everyone, we'll take a detour to bring Mia home, is that fine?"

I asked everyone beside the two who were sleeping. Since no one disagree, it's decided.

5-7. Mistake and Clean-up

Satou's here. They said that carelessness is one's greatest enemy, but precisely because ones doesn't realize their carelessness that I feel that they would fail. Things you get accustomed with are the most dangerous, it's the same for any world.

◇

Now then, shall I pay a visit to our magician comes midnight?
I'd hate to get attacked by the army of ants when the morning dawn ...ants are not nocturnal right?

I go inside the wagon alone, and begin to change my clothes. Since Arisa is peeking, I roll up my smelly sweaty shirt into a ball and throw it on her face. Suffer well in that stink.

I'm still wearing a mantle on the outside, but I change into thick trousers and shirt inside, and also knee-high leather boots. Since I will be trekking the mountain, it'd be inconvenient to wear a robe.

"Sniff, sniff, snifff."
"Arisa, stop it, that's vulgar."

This is the first time I saw Lulu scolding Arisa. Still, what the heck is this girl doing? No, I understand when I see it, but I refuse to acknowledge it....
Aren't you too much of a pervert to sniff on a smelly shirt?
I take the shirt away from Arisa and give it to Lulu.

"I'm sorry, but please wash this when you're doing laundry."
"Yes, master."
"Before that, let me enjoy the teens' scent""Auu."

I poked her forehead before she finished.

"Love is too painful~ please do the punishing in more sensual way!"
"There are a lot of other girls who cry for being defiled, treat yourself better."
"Uuu~ I'm a maiden too."

A maiden wouldn't do such things--- At least publicly.

"At any rate, what are you going to do by changing clothes?"
"I'll do some reconnaissance."

I'm actually going to the magician's place, but I won't say it.

"I will accompany master."

And so Liza proposed, but I persuaded her to defend the camp. She insisted that I take Pochi and Tama as bodyguards, but when I said that I'd go back before the sun set, she let me go.

◇

Truthfully, I won't be going straight to the magician's place right away. I want to enlarge the search area before the next pursuing armies come, so I'm going to retrace the course until the area where the rat cavalries was devastated. I should be able to reach it before the sun set if I run.

After I reach a place invisible from the camp, I run at the level where the ground gouged. In just five minutes, I've reached the place where Arisa massacred the ants with her unique skill.
The ants which pile up on one after another are obstructing the road. I lightly jump over it.
A lot of small animals are gathering, perhaps the monsters' corpses are delicious.

Even so, with this many monsters' corpses, it will interfere with the traffic.
If this was a game then it would disappear in time but reality is troublesome.

...Hmm?

...Dang.

"'Reality is troublesome', not that!"

I stop my feet, and look back at the mountain of monsters' corpses.

I'm imagining for a bit.
In a highway with scarce traffics, monsters corpses piled up. Corpses which died with no external injury and with only one arrow stuck. Normal person would be interested to know more. And then, the only wagon that has passed this route was ours.
If it's not someone really dumb, they would probably connect the corpses with us.

This is bad.

I change my plan, and indiscriminately stow away the monster corpses in the ants folder inside the Storage. I had thought of dismantling and throw them on the roadsides but I decided to use storage since it'd be too time-consuming.
Since the corpses are not displayed on the radar, I rely on my sight. It was easy to remove the corpses on the open road, but the ones stuck on the thickets a bit away were hard works.
Nevertheless, thanks to me repeating the corpses retrieval with all my effort, the road is cleared from them as far as eyes can see before the sun set.

I'm hiding bloods and traces of battles with suitably long tree branches. They would probably attract attention but it's better than puddle of bloods in plain sight.
Since I see from the radar that Pochi and Tama are departing from the camp to look for me, I finish hiding the bloods with trees from the Storage and

return.

This took more time than I thought, so I couldn't do my original goal.

◇

With Pochi and Tama hanging on my arms on the sides, I walk down the highway in sunset.
I'm hearing chewing sounds of small animals from the bushes on the roadsides. There are probably some pieces from the corpses, I feel sorry for taking away foods for the small animals. And it was unexpectedly hard to keep Pochi and Tama from pushing through to the bushes.

In a place 10 minutes walking distance away from the camp, I catch a monster on the radar.

Let's check the detail.

Gargoyle, level 5. Plainly speaking, it's a flying stone statue. Noteworthy points are complete immunity to mind attack and night vision. Also, it's hard, since it's a stone statue.
It could be an independent monster or a familiar of the magician. It's probably the latter this time.

Its moving speed is slightly faster than a person.
The gargoyle destination is probably the place where Arisa massacred the large groups of ants right?

"Master~?""What's wrong desu?"

Pochi and Tama pull my hands. I've stopped swinging them on my arms.

"Tama, do you have the throwing stones?"
"Aye."

Then, I should drop it with a stone.

"I forgot something, let's go back."
"Yes nano desu~.""Aye~."

I spin the two like spinning tops while on my arms. Since they demand to do it again, I do it thrice after that.
More, they said but since it'd be troublesome if we can't secure best location to attack the gargoyle, I promise them to do it again once we get back to the camp site.

◇

The three of us are hiding beside a shelter. Although I said shelter, it's just a rock as high as a grown man.

The gargoyle is flying overhead us.
After a moment pause, I throw two fist-sized stones with both hands. I throw one more a beat later. All three stones hit the target and the gargoyle becomes a mere broken statue.

"Co reco co re.""Core nano desu~."

Is that a core retrieval song? While listening to the mysterious song, I watch over Tama who's singing with strange intonation and Pochi who's interluding her while both of them retrieving the core.
Just like the ants, low level monsters have small magic core with pale color. The price is most likely cheap too.

"Aye.", so she says while presenting the core. I put it in my pocket straight into the storage. And then we head back to the camp site.

Needless to say, the two didn't ask what was the [Something] that I forgot.

◇

Since I don't want to needlessly make Lulu and Mia worry, I only tell the gargoyle thing to Arisa and Liza.

And since the probability that the camp would get attacked when I go toward the magician is high, I decided not to do a late-night visit.
Although, even if I don't go there, I feel like the opponent will come here instead.

The night watch tonight will be in 3 shifts. The first are Liza and Arisa, the second are Pochi and Tama and the last are me, Mia and Lulu. They're alloted according to the potential of enemy search and fighting equally. I'd be glad to have Lulu together with Arisa, but since I wouldn't know what to do with just me and the taciturn girl, I made her join us.

Pochi and Tama take position on the left and right of me who's lying on the sheet. We've been sleeping together since the time in Labyrinth. Although I didn't sleep at all since I was on guard at that time.

"Together~.""Nano desu~."
"Good night, Pochi, Tama."
"Aye~.""Nighty~."

I could hear Arisa grumbling from a distance, but since it's nothing much, I let it off. Lulu and Mia were at loss finding the place to sleep, but by Arisa's suggestion, they will be sleeping beside us. It's a bit crowded but since it's warm, it's nice.

I frantically try to retain my consciousness which was almost taken away by the comfortable warmth. There'll be 3 shifts of night watch, but since it's almost certain that there will be a night attack, I'll be careful not to sleep. While watching the radar, I'm reading the book from the menu to prevent

drowsiness. This is going to be a long night.

5-8. Shadow Stalker

Satou's here. It's nice to have handy tools, but relying too much on it made you unable to notice the oddness with your own eyes, thus unthinkable mistake happens.
This happens in daily life, work and even in another world.

◇

Just before Liza and Arisa's night watch duty is over, I see enemies on the map.
There are three monsters called Shadow Stalkers. Since I've never heard of it, I check their details. Level 12, it has [Physical Damage Halved], [Stamina Drain] as race specific skills, if I don't have any means to counter it they might become formidable enemies. It doesn't like they're undeads. Their speeds aren't that fast, but they would probably get here in 1 hour. The enemies probably have ran out of flying type monsters.

I'm arranging various things related to battle to be displayed from the menu. And then I turn my view to my chest. I had thought that something has been pressuring my chest for a while but as it turn out, it's Pochi and Tama who climbed on my chest and stomach while letting out ,"Gude~", sounds, sleeping there lying on their bellies.
I place them on the sheet while being careful not to wake them, and get up.

"Ara? Master, are you doing yobai?"
<TLN: http://everything2.com/title/yobai>
"Are you having trouble sleeping? Master?"

Arisa, whose somehow being held on Liza's arms called me out. Liza is probably already sleepy, her voice is weak without power. I should let her sleep a little before the enemies get here.

"I'll change with you, so it's fine for you two to sleep."

"Is it okay? Isn't the next turn going to be Pochi and Tama?"
"I'll make the two do the watch duty together with Lulu in early morning."

Arisa ,whose free from Liza's hold is coming while saying, "Let me sleep on your laps~.", but I lift and roll her to beside Lulu. Arisa is probably tired too, without complaining she goes to sleep while using Lulu as a body pillow. Lulu's painful expression from being clung by Arisa is cute too. I'm almost taken over with wicked thought but I manage to forcibly shake it off.

I continue watching the map while adding twigs to the bonfire. It's still 50 minutes before the monsters arrive. Since back then, the monsters doesn't increase in number.

"...I'm thirsty."

Mia who has woken up hands me a water bottle. After I receive it she sits beside me while I'm drinking the water.

"Why?"

A small voice comes out of Mia. It doesn't seem to be a monologue.

"Why am I protecting you from the magician?"
"Yes."
"As you can see, there's nothing deep to it."

Likely not satisfied with my answer, she falls silent.

"It's dangerous."
"Looks like it, a lot of monsters did come out back in the afternoon."
"Mize and even the others... died."

Come to think of it, what's the relation between elves and the rat-men?

"The red-helmet(Mize)-san, do you know him from somewhere?"
"Forest."

"Bornean Forest?"
"Yes."

Connecting the story from the few words of Mia, it seems that the red-helmet was saved by Mia's parent when he was dying and surrounded by goblins outside the forest 10 years ago. The red-helmet then stayed in Mia's parent house for a while while being taught together with Mia various things by Mia's parent, so they became acquainted.
It seems that the red helmet he was wearing was a mithril product given by Mia's parent. So it exists, mithril huh.
The reason the red-helmet called Mia princess, was probably because of this.

"Did you get attacked by the magician when you're visiting Mize-san's hometown together with him?"
"No."

After asking her in several angles, I understood the rough situation. Seems that Mia was abducted from her hometown on the forest by the magician, and held captive in a maze in a mountain. The magician then forcibly made her to be the "Master of Mazes" with a forced contract ceremony. Even if she's called master, she was nothing more than the proxy of the magician, she was forced to sit in the master room for half a day.
According to Mia, the maze's movement is weak, so she's probably some sort of a key or a catalyst.

"Did Mize-san come to help you on the maze?"
"A coincidence."

Mia denies while shaking her head. When I inquire for more details, it seems that she executed an emergency escape command on the Maze Core when there was a chance at the time the magician went back to his room. When I said "You know well", she said, "It's in elf language." Perhaps, she pushed something like a button written in elf language.
And then she escaped to the Rat-men village and reunited with the red-helmet there.

"The village was burnt because of my fault."

Mia painfully said so. I hold her shoulder and say, "It's not your fault." to console her. In times like this anyone would want to be comforted even if it's just merely words of consolation.
The subordinates of the magician who came to look for Mia seemed to have burned down the village as a lesson. Those subordinates got disposed by the red helmet and his friends in a counterattack, but there were some villagers who fell victims. Hence, it was hard for her to stay in the village, so the red helmet with his subordinates were going to escort Mia to meet the elf in Seryuu city.
And then, when they were going down the mountain--

"We were attacked."
"By the flying ants right?"
"Yes."

From then on, it's probably the same as we have seen.

◇

Meanwhile, the shadow stalkers are stopping at the site where the flying ants were decimated by Arisa's uniques skills in the afternoon.

I should wake everyone soon.
I call Pochi while sending magic power to the Light Hot Plate.

"Pochi."

Pochi who's sleeping with Tama curling up like a ball is reacting with her ears twitching. Pochi is getting up while rubbing her eyes and looking so sleepy.

"Unyu~, food?"

"Not that, wake everyone up since I feel some presences from the forest."

Among these members, Pochi is the easiest to wake up. The one with the worst waking habit is Liza.

"It's not morning but wake up nodesu~."

She steps on Tama's stomach and knocks on Arisa's head with a whack. Lulu gets up hearing Pochi's voice.

"Liza wake up too nodesu."

Liza's body is swaying from the shaking but she's only groaning without waking up. Tama get on top of Liza's stomach to assist Pochi. However, while half-asleep, Liza catches the two and hugs them.

"Mugyu~.""Wake up~?"

Looks like the two will be like that until Liza wakes up.
Arisa is coming to the bonfire while yawning with her mouth wide open. Lulu puts her hand in front of her mouth and begins yawning cutely. Where is this difference in girl power coming from?

"Fuwaah~ is it enemies?"
"They're still far, but there are three coming."
"Judging from the atmosphere, they're not powerful."

I teach her about the enemies' types and characteristics.

"They're not undead right? Then they're easy preys with mind magic."

When she gets to the bonfire and sees Mia who is sitting besides me, Arisa does an exaggerated gesture by opening her eyes wide while saying, "What a fearful girl!". Who is she imitating?

"Hey wait, you have me if you want to do it with someone!"

"Stop saying those stupid things. I was just hearing her rough situations."
"Then why is she clinging to your arm?"

Come to think of it, Mia is clinging to my right arm before I knew it. I thought we were separated after I activated the light hot plate earlier. Since I'm used to be hugged by Pochi and Tama, I didn't mind it.
Mia parts her hands after being pointed out by Arisa.

"'I didn't hug him.'"
"She didn't hug me she says."
"That's a lie! I saw you separating just now."
"'It must be a mistake.'"
"If you're an adult, don't fuss too much over it."
"Gunununu~."

I receive a cup of tea from Lulu who's handing it. Am I thinking too much for seeing Mia who casually sits beside me after getting the tea?

"Liza, here nano desu."
"Nya, my tail hurts~."

Following the two, Liza has woken up.
I wonder if Pochi and Tama dislike tea, they're drinking plain boiled waters that Lulu had put. By the way, Tama can drink hot water just fine. She drank soup just fine too.

"Liza, it's about time to wake up."

I said so to her, and her loosened face began to rapidly tighten. After confirming me visually, to keep up her appearance, she greets me with composed face.

"G, good morning, master."
"Good morning."

It's not morning though.

I should make them get ready soon.

"Enemies are closing in. Wash your face and keep awake."

Everyone begin the preparation, only Tama who keeps staring at the top of a tree. There aren't enemies there according to the radar.

"Is there something over there?"
"Those birds, weird~?"

Birds?
There are around 20 owls nesting there. It's certainly a bit scary.

◇

It seems that the shadow stalkers have noticed the bonfire, they're enclosing in to this camping ground. They're at the other side of the owls' tree.

The three beastkin girls are in charge of the middle. Arisa will deal with the enemis on the right. Me and Mia are left to deal with the enemies on the left. Lulu is taking refuge in the wagon for safety.

I'm hearing fluttering sounds from behind.
Is it the owl earlier?

I look back for a bit to confirm it.
It is really an owl from earlier. It has a single red head-feather as its characteristic. Since the place where the owl landed is the place where we buried the boar remain for dinner earlier, it's probably attracted to the smell. I'm convinced with that and look back to the front.

Right at that time, a red dot indicating an enemy suddenly appears on the radar--- Furthermore, it's at point blank range.

5-9. Shadow and Magician

Satou's here. The one who's weak to horror movie, Satou.

I'm fine with ghost or apparition, but I'm scared with faces of the characters who got into spasms in terror.

◇

The enemy who suddenly springs up comes from the direction of the owl just before.
Appearing from the stretched shadow behind the owl, it's a figure of a person wearing black robe. I can't see its face because its wearing a hood and long sleeves.

"I've come to pick you, Mia."

Mia who's beside me is trembling.

"...No."

This man with the bent back is, without a doubt, the magician. The owl from earlier is nesting on the man's shoulder. Is it a pet or a familiar?

I put myself to protect Mia behind me, and check on his status. His name is Zen, level is high at 41. Skill is--- [Unknown].

This unpleasant feeling, is he the same kind as Arisa and the heroes?
While agitated I continue to read his status--- What is this?! Skill [Unknown] also appears there.

Mia is trembling behind me.
I can roughly understand the details. This guy is too dangerous for anyone but me. Let's deal with him carefully. It seems impossible, but I'd like to

settle this with discussion if possible.

"Nice to meet you, magician-dono. I'm Satou, a merchant."
"I don't have business with someone like a merchant."

The magician doesn't seem like he'd even bother to introduce himself.
I wonder if it's because he looks down on merchants or he just has low communication skill.

"Even if you don't, I have a duty to protect this girl. I won't pass her to a suspicious man."
"Fumu, you seem to be protected by generous and skillful mercenaries, but if they stand before me it will become a bloodbath, do you understand?"

The magician points his cane here while keeping his back bent.

"It's no good! Master, this guy is too strong."

Arisa warned me from behind.

"I am the great King of Night. It's good that you know your place, but trashes don't have any place to call me 'this guy'."

This is bad, the magician's attention is directed toward Arisa.

"■■■■　■――"

The magician begins to chant magic toward Arisa.

I don't want to leave Mia, but I can't afford not to now. I rush toward the magician, and strike his stomach with my fist.
But the strike is unable to stop the magician's chant. My fist has penetrated the magician's robe, but there is no response at all. Is it this guy's unique skill?

"---Shadow Whip."

When the magician finishes his chant, shadow stretches from his foot to form something that look like a spear that plunge toward Arisa. Is that the shadow whip?
I'm back stepping away from the magician, and I cut myself between the shadow whip and Arisa.

I block the shadow whip with my whole body. The shadow whip coils around my body, at that time I feel some small pricks.

>[Shadow Magic Skill Acquired]
>[Shadow Resistance Skill Acquired]

What do you mean with shadow resistance.
Ah, it's been a while since my scientific blood denies the fantasy.

But I'm profiting from this trouble.
I feel like the resistance skill will be of small importance in this situation, but let's increase the chance to protect Mia even if only a little.
I allocate points to shadow resistance and activate it.

◇

"Fumu, that's an unbelievable body. Are you really a merchant?"
"A friend of mine calls me nimble merchant."

From behind our conversation, I can hear Arisa whimper.

"It's useless, it really didn't work."

Did Arisa counterattack when the magician started to chant? Her magic power decreased for a bit. There is absolutely no change to the magician, he probably has resistance.

"To put yourself in front of a woman to protect them from my attack, you have my praise."
"If you admire me then won't you back down?"
"That's a different story. Mia is needed to achieve my goal."

I'm finally able to free myself from the shadow whip. This shadow whip only gives me insignificant prickly damages but it had no substance and no reaction so I couldn't tear it off. Yet it could be used to restrain thing, some fantasy substance it is.

"What is your goal?"
"There is no meaning to tell you that. If you want to save Mia, then bring a hero along."
"Do you have some grudges on heroes?"

The magician doesn't answer and laughs loudly while looking up the sky. Accompanying his laughter, countless shadow whips appear from his feet. Does the spell earlier retain its effect?

It's going to abduct Mia who stands listlessly. If physical attack isn't working then how about magic attack.
I take out magic guns from the pocket, equip them on both hands, and set the power scale to the MAX.
For someone of this guy's level, this much probably won't kill him.

"Way off the mark."

Following the magician's word, the magic whips expand toward me and Mia. I intercept the shadow whips with the magic guns. Dual wielding guns feels like a chuunibyou from somewhere, I don't like it.

It's working.
I succeeded in destroying every magic whips that had went toward Mia, while I let the one that came toward me to coil itself on me. I wasn't able to destroy them all as expected.

"Those are quite good weapons."
"Is that so? If you leave Mia alone then I will give you one, how about it?"

While offering the trade to the magician, I smash the shadow whip coiling my body with the magic guns.
I hear Mia's short scream from behind.

I turn just my head, Mia is being restricted by shadow appearing from her feet.
More shadow whips appear from the magician and restrict me.
The magician begins to chant a new magic.

I can't let him casts more magic than this, I fire the magic guns to the magician. His health decreases but immediately recovers before the next shot.
Is this guy's unique skill invincibility?
I change my aim to the cane, and fire the magic bullet.

"Help me nodesu!" "Help~?"

Pochi and Tama seemed to try to do something to the shadow whips but they slipped through it. Even just slipping through the shadow whip seems to give them damage, the two jump back while screaming.
Liza and Arisa are looking here from a cover while waiting for their chance and eluding the magic whips.

All the magic bullets that I fire are blocked by the shadow whips that appear from the magician's feet.
Then, finally the magician's magic, [Shadow Portal], is activated.

Mia's body is sinking into the shadow.
I give up on shooting the magician, and hold Mia's upper body from sinking with brute force.

"I'll have you return this girl. Since it'd trouble me if you're careless, I'll say this, if you try to forcibly pull her, Mia's life will be no more."

The magician is sinking into shadow too. I still can't see his face.

"You are no match for a transcendent being like me, resign from your unreasonable struggle. If you wish for death then you're free to visit my maze, I expect a show of courage and wisdom to break through it."

The magician disappears into the shadow while laughing loudly. He didn't see through Mia's sinking until the end, is it because he has allowance to do so or because of carelessness.

My body is almost dragged into the shadow too, but maybe because of my resistance, it stops at 1 cm deep.
The pulling power of the shadow for Mia is strong. My pulling power is even stronger, but Mia's health gradually decreases. If I put more power than this, Mia's body would break.

I have decided.

"Arisa! When morning comes, go ask for assistance at the worker's guild manager."

After telling her that, I let myself sink into the shadow with Mia.

Arisa and the girls should be able to deal with the shadow stalkers somehow. If possible without injuries I hope.
That manager is unreliable but this time it's a crisis of a person from his tribe, Nadi-san should be able to arrange for it.

◇

After I'm sunk, there is only jet black space around.
There is no sound or light, it truly feels like inside shadow. Of course there is no air too.
It is indeed a bit painful. My health decrease faster than from the coiling

shadow whip. Still, probably thanks to self-healing, it comes back up at fixed interval. Perhaps, I've become unable to die by suffocation.

Even with air, a person would go mad if they spend too long in this place.

Thanks to the lack of oxygen, I can't concentrate well.

Yes, how about Mia.
Since I can't even look at my own body, it goes without saying that I can't see her either.

I take out Light Drop from Storage and pour it magic power.
I thought that I could see my body then but it didn't work. The radar shows only me too.
I use [All Map Exploration] after a long time of not using it. But unfortunately, radar display remains as it is. It might really be only me around.

I open the map and see it.
There, something is written-- [It's an area with no map].

"What's this a game!"

I retorted.

And then, as if the voice is echoing back to back, the shadow space with no sound is breaking, like a glass, vanishing into fragments.
<TLN: We Majin Buu now lol>

◇

I'm in a place like the one nobles use to have audiences with people. It's a vertical room, like a school gymnasium cut in half. The floors are made of stones, fat circular stone pillars are lined up along the wall, and candlesticks

attached to the wall are emitting LED-like magical lights. There's a throne in the furthermost of the interior, and in that interior a sphere 2 meter big in diameter is blinking rainbow lights while floating at knee-high height.

Mia who is made to sleep is sitting on the throne. Beside her, an unknown beautiful blond woman is nursing her. Her face looks exactly like Mia, but her breasts are outrageously big. No, such thing doesn't matter now.

The magician who is running his fingers through something that looks like a music stand beside the throne notices me, before I could rush to him.

"Absurd!"

Even while surprised, the guy is not loosening his fingers from playing the music stand.

"Yes, absurd! How did you escape from my prison of shadow! It's something that shouldn't be broken by a group of low level people like you bastards."

Are you surprised, boasting or looking down, be clear about it.
My feet are a bit unstable, I wonder if it's the effect from the shadow space earlier.

"I have a light amulet with me. Shadow magic isn't going to work."

Oops, I wasn't going to tell him the true reason but even for deceiving him the detail was too appropriate. Is it thanks to deception skill?

"I see, I cannot permit unfairness. This room is only allowed for people who have captured the maze, those who earn it can come here, that's the rule."

The magician stops there, and nods to his own words.

"And then, the hero who is able to get here, is the one who is qualified to annihilate me, the King of Immortal."

What is this guy saying?
Capture the maze, does he want to kill himself?
Furthermore, didn't he say that he's a King of Night initially? He can't decide the name for himself.

But, rather than that, I feel slightly mad at this guy's excuse. He got our girls and Mia in trouble for such reason?

"If you want to die then go do it yourself. Don't involve other people."
"Fuhahaha, I have received blessing from the god, I am immortal."

It's unpleasant, but if I continue this stupid talk, my feet will recover soon.
But, the other guy doesn't seem like he intend to continue.

"Well then, I'll have you leave from the master room."

The door located beside the throne is opening and then--

5-10. Maze of Trazayuya

Satou's here. When I was in grade school, I love the free time to play during the school athletic festival.
When I became an adult, I occasionally went to fitness clubs to move my body, but in this world, I wonder if there are facilities that provide you place to safely forge your body?

◇

Right now I am falling.

I had prepared myself for the enemies when the door beside the throne was opening, but instead, the one who came out was a beautiful woman who looked exactly like the woman who was caring for Mia.

Right when I was distracted with that, they activated the true mechanism to reject me out of the master room.
The entire floor disappeared. To make the entire room into a pitfall, even a death trap has its limit. No, the trap discovery skill didn't activate so it might have been an impromptu trap.

I don't think that I'd die even at the current falling speed but I'd hate it if I'm sunk deeply into the ground without any mean to get out.
Maybe I should stick some things on the wall to decrease this speed, like often seen in manga.
I take out a sledgehammer from the Storage and kick it strongly, the reaction force makes me collide with the wall on the opposite side. The wall is soft and smooth, there is no place for gripping.

I take out a great black iron sword from the storage and stab it into the wall. With a screeching sounds, my falling speed gradually decreases. My wrist hurts a little.
After I reached a certain speed, the great sword, seemingly hit its limit,

breaks.

I fell into a water body on the bottom of the hole before I could take out another great sword.

I experienced only little shock since I arranged my feet to make my fall straight
I sunk considerably deep but since the velocity was quite reduced, I didn't hit the bottom.

While swimming up to get to the water surface, I execute [All Map Exploration] magic.

The map displays [Maze of Trazayuya].
The maze consists of 20 levels with each having 500 meters diameter. It's pretty small compared to the labyrinth in the labyrinth city. According to the book that I've read, there are at least 200 floors that has been explored there, with more to come. Furthermore, each floor is several kilometers wide, so this one is quite obviously smaller.
Moreover, most passages are systemically perpendicular. It's exactly a maze. While the demon's labyrinth felt kind of biological, this maze feels systematic or rather, artificially made.

I finally get my face out of the water.
The place that I've fallen into is blocked off by stone walls. I could see a few mosses growing on the stone walls. According to the map, the 20th level is 300 meter above.
Looks like this level is modeled like the outside.

From what I see on the map, there is no enemy here.
The exit is two kilometers to the west. A bit further to the east, there's a hidden door called [Room of Trazayuya]. Judging from the name, it's probably the room where the secret of this maze is sleeping, though since I already know the route, it's probably unneeded.

....No, I cannot deceive myself.

I really want to save Mia as soon as possible but I'm curious with that Trazayuya room too. It might be just a simple intuition, but I feel like I must go there.

I apologize to Mia in my heart and begin dashing to the hidden door.

It's hard to swim because of my clothes. Particularly my boots, it's hard to kick the water because of it.
Since no one sees me, I put my clothes inside the storage. I discovered that I could directly put what I wear into the storage.

◇

The hidden door is protected by the same kind of riddle from the labyrinth of demon on Seryuu city but thanks to DeRiddle skill, I easily get through it.

The hidden door is letting out moldy smells. The walls and the floors aren't made of stones but resin-like materials.
This looks like someone's research room. It's fully equipped with dining room, bathroom and bedroom. From the accumulated dust, the magician (Zen) have probably never come to this room.
I'm fascinated with the tub on the bathroom, but this isn't a situation where I could casually take a bath.

There are many books and memo in this research lab. I don't know how many yeas has passed for the books, but most books beside the magic books have deteriorated really badly so I put them inside the menu to read from there.

I already have a guess it from the maze's name, but it's said that the creator of this maze is called Trazayuya. He is an elf. Moreover, it seems that he's from the same hometown as Mia.
All the books are written in elf language. If I didn't get the language from the red helmet, I wouldn't be able to read them at all.

There are some places where the inks are blurred, but I could roughly read it.
It seems that this maze was made by Trayazuya-shi and the elves for the sake of "Safety", mimicking the labyrinth's function.
The memo tells about the guy's anguish, or rather, his over-protectiveness for his tribe.

'We, the elves, have weak attachment to life. When faced with desperate situation, we don't struggle much compared to other tribes. Because of this, a lot of our younger generations died in the labyrinth. This maze is made as an absolute necessity for when the elves need to flee from dangers to safety.'

Others details are like, how the maze has something called Maze Core not unlike Labyrinth Core, although it cannot grow up like a labyrinth, but it sucks up magic power from its surrounding and refines it into magic cores just like a labyrinth.

And then I found some disturbing words.

'The facilities to make artificial monsters by inserting magic cores into existing creatures on cultivation tanks have been completed.'

Are monsters originally normal creatures?
Certainly the monsters that I've fought up until now are all looking like deformed normal creatures. Since Wagahai-kun was a demon, that particular one is probably entirely different.
After thinking about that, I feel a bit reluctance in drinking potions which are made from magic cores.

Let's get back on track. I'll think about that later.

Trazayuya-shi has made three prototyping facilities. A facility to cultivate monsters. A facility that produce golems. And a facility to create dolls that would serve people.
However, since he earned the cooperation from the rat-men community nearby, he abandoned the last one.

Suddenly, I'm interested with what the monsters who live here are eating. I wonder if they cannibalize each other or if there are feeder monsters being produced?

Even after the maze was completed, the other elves didn't come here.
There is one thing at the end of his note.

'No one would forget my failure in just 100 years. My life will soon end. This maze will be sealed until my countrymen need it in the future. I believe that the day where the elves lead the world once again will come--- Trazayuya Bornean.'
<TLN: I'm normalizing the elf forest's name to Bornean, since it probably comes from 'Borneo'.>

I see, so this is why Mia is needed. Still, the magician is good to have known how to solve the seal without reading this note.

I have obtained various informations but I have not gained the way to save Mia.
I'm a bit worried with a scribbling that read, "Explosions are romance!", but there probably aren't any idiots who would make self-destruction mechanism in a facility that was made for safety.

Since there doesn't seem to be any way to get back to the main level from this one, I decided to get out of the maze from one end and search for the main entrance.

I continue through the road from the underground lake that I had fallen into to the exit. I can't run since it's narrow with stalactites poking out here and there. Flowing water from the underground lakes are dripping from the stalactites.

While minding as not to step aquatic creatures that look like salamanders, I continue walking to the exit.

◇

The exit is on a vertical cliff 5 meters above the ground.
I try confirming my location on the map but since I'm in an unexplored area, I perform [All Map Exploration] magic.
This here is [Ash Rats Principality]. It's five mountains away from the highway that we had traveled. It seems there is a rat-men community about one mountain away from here. Even though it's called principality, the village only has around 1000 people.

The entrance of the maze is located near the summit of this mountain.

Since it's a bit dark, I take out the Light Drop to light the surrounding.
I can't find decent footholds.

It can't be helped, I jump down 5 meters to the ground.

I feel something not right when I look around.
I had thought that it was because right now is early winter, but it's too strange that there aren't even any sounds of insects. Most trees have their leaves fallen, and even among the fallen leaves, most of them are withered.
I have always call them another world tree, but the AR displays that they are called Shiiya trees. Even evergreen trees can have their leaves fall.

I'm bothered with them, but right now my top priority is to get to the maze's entrance.

◇

I run up the mountain. Since the underbrushes have withered, there aren't many obstacles.

Along the way, from the radar, I caught sight of a big tree on the mountainside.
It's not in red, but it's a level 20 fairy tribe. I wonder if it's a trent?

If I continue to run on this course, I would get near it, but since I could just escape even if it turn out to be hostile, I continue on.

When I run on the side of that tree, the log displays [Resisted charm effect].

On the base of the tree... There's a big-breasted older sister in nurse outfit.

No well, I do like nurse outift.
But think about the TPO even if you're an illusion.

"Excuse me, o young gentleman over there."

Moreover, her speech style is from the historical drama.
The AR indicates that it's a Dryad. Level 21. It's a tribe with charm and illusion skills.

"Do you have to be so hasty in the middle of the night? If you don't mind, how about a cup of sake?"

The girl points to a red table and chairs that appeared out of nowhere, filled with sake and foods on top.
Rather than dryad, I feel like being fooled by a fox.

The dryad approached me and took my arm when I was distracted with the table. I feel something soft on my arm.
I'm almost tempted to enjoy the poyonpoyon while drinking, but I mustn't forget about Mia.

"I'm sorry but I don't have any time to accompany you, if you have a business then can you please say it quick?"

After I said so, the illusion disappears, and a girl with green long hair that

touch her feet appears, in bare skin. She looks to be around 12-13 years old I guess? So the feeling earlier was an illusion too, her actual figure is quite modest. Since I can't be turned on with that, I'd like you to cover yourself. Be more modest please.
Her expression has changed from the bewitching one earlier to stern. It's the face of a child whose not used to being angry so there is no force to it.

"Become mine, human!"
"I'm sorry, but how about proposing again in 7-8 years?"
"No, become my meal!"

The girl says that all kind of trees here has died for several months making the animals disappear. Furthermore, the earth veins on the mountain were cut off recently so she is dying.
It's most likely the fault of the [Maze of Trazayuya].

"This is because you humans sucked the mountain's nourishment."
"I could give you a bit of my health and magic, but I cannot allow you to eat me."

Seems that I went easy because the opponent looks like a child.

"If you give me your magic then I'll eat it."
"That's good."

I let her sucks my MP. I had thought that it would be like vampire sucking from the neck but turned out that it's directly from the mouth. Frankly speaking, it's a kiss.
Kissing a young naked girl, I can't let my acquaintances see this.

The girl was satisfied after sucking 300 MP.
After that, I arrived at the maze's entrance without any particular problem.

5-11. Maze of Trazayuya (2)

Satou's here. When I was a child, I was good at solving the maze quiz that appeared on the corner of newspapers.
When I became an adult, the only experience involving maze that I had was from the one on theme parks.

◇

The maze's entrance is a tower of about one and half meters high. The tower is hidden by the vegetations, so ones wouldn't find it if they didn't know about it in the first place.
There are some traces of people going in and out, but even those are few.
According to the map, there's a back door used for monsters to go in and out.

I open the door and go inside the tower. It's carelessly not locked.
I was contemplating to wear the silver mask before I went in, but since the magician is the same kind as Arisa, he probably had seen my name. Since it's better that silver mask = Satou is not known, let's not transform into the silver mask this time.

I look up the enemies information inside the maze to prepare the necessary weapons. The majority of them are flying ants at level 5-8, and skeletons are at level 1-3. The slightly stronger ones are the level 18 bone golems and the level 15 wood golems.
The other curious ones are like slime-based enemies and homonculus, but they're small fries at level 5.
It's just that, I'm a bit interested with the [Nature Art] that the homonculus have. What kind of skill is that? Is it the same kind as Nature Magic?
If the situations allow, I'd like Liza and the girls to learn it.

The high level ones are the iron golem located in a large room in the center of the maz, and the magician in the master room.

My equipment will be a saber rather than a shield, and a submachine-gun-like magic gun. I'm not using the usual magic gun since this one seems to be stronger.

Actually, this is a high performance gun that could fire 50 bullets per second when charged with magic power once, but since it needs 10 minutes cool down once it fire all the bullets at once, I haven't used it until now.
For this occasion, I choose to use [Scatter] shoot mode since I don't have to worry with friendly fires. Even though the power is lower than usual, it's enough for fighting the small fries.

I put on the overcoat that I took off when I feel into the lake. It's different from what I wear just now, it's thick but cheap thing I've bought on the east district of Seryuu city. This is good enough for the blood of my victims.

I go down the spiral stairs while straightening my equipment.

◇

I've entered the maze after I got out of the stairs.
The ground is different from the resin-like thing on the underground, but although it looks like stone pavement, it somehow feels like plants. The visibility is good since lights are leaking through the crevices on the floorboards.
This is good since I don't have torches like when I was in the labyrinth.

I could hear some light metal clang-clang sounds from somewhere, although I don't know what kind of thing could produces that sounds. Since I still don't understand even after listening to it carefully, I decided to put it in the corner of my mind.

Since I have no intention of fighting steadily, I look up for the shortest route to the master room.

I kick and destroy the skeletons that I meet, and throw bones on any flying ants who come up, eliminating them.
Even though I've prepared a nice gun, it didn't get any turn at all.

Still, this skeleton's skull is not that of human. It's probably from rat-man tribes.

This maze isn't like the one typically in a game where you go to lower level every time you clear a level. Rather, the blocks are connected in three-dimensional formations and you might go up and down in complex structures.

Even on this stair I'm descending right now the wall-like object isn't touchable making it feels like a trompe l'oeil making me unsure whether I'm descending or ascending.

This is like a theme park somehow.

While thinking about that, a skeleton that I kicked left out a big magic core. Since the magic core got out in bare, I pick it up. It's impossible to do it for the ants.
I thought that it's strange so I checked on the log, it turns out that the thing that I just defeated was a bone golem not a skeleton. The level difference is 6, but it didn't feel different from the other small fries.

The enemies resistances are weak, I'm advancing through the trap smoothly too, however the road becomes dead end in front of me. According to the marker, there should be a path here though?

I check on the map, it's certainly a dead end here.
After double-checking, I understood that this maze is changing its joints with the passage of time. The sounds that I occasionally heard signified the changing of its joints.

What a uselessly amazing gimmick. It's something that even modern science would be hard-pressed to reproduce in a way.

I continue advancing the maze while checking the map whenever I hear the sounds.
Since I was running while minding the map, I'm plunging into a passage where a lot of slimes gathered.
It's finally the turn for the rapid-fire magic gun. They all die in just 3 burst, but the ground becomes slimy it's disgusting.

◇

I've finally arrived at the large room in the center. This place is unmoving, serving as the halfway point. It's 5 meter high and 20 meter wide here.

When I got into the room, the door automatically closes and the magic formation on the center begins to shine.
An Iron Golem pushes out of the magic cirlce. Beside it, a beautiful blond woman like the one in the master room stands. This golem is fastened with rivets, looking like a pre-war thing.
I see now, this girl is a homonculus. That explains why there are several people with the same faces. Judging from their faces, I wonder if Mia is the base?

I change the rapid-fire gun mode from scatter to convergence.
The iron golem is close to 4 meter high. There are the same letters as the stone golem from the labyrinth on its forehead.

"You did good to have come this far, explorer-dono."

It's an easy-to-listen charming voice even in this situation. Though she's speaking in monotone so it breaks the immersion.

"I'm a merchant though."
"Merchant? ...O explorer! You did well to come here."

After looking puzzled while tilting her head, she tilted it back and continue to talk. She's moving like a doll.
You're insisting me to be an explorer huh.

"I'll give the excellent you the right to fight the guardian. If you could beat the guardian, I'll admit that you have the qualification to advance ahead. The winner will be given a reward from the master of the maze."

She was still speaking in monotone. It feels like in an elementary school festival.
The beautiful woman doesn't mind the unamused me and continues the talk, following the scenario.

"Now, let the fight begin. O iron giant, there is no need to hold back."

The woman gets to the corner of the room after finishing her long speech. Her face looks satisfied, or rather, proud.

After the woman got to the corner of the room, the iron golem starts moving. I pierce the character on the golem's forehead with the rapid-fire magic gun. Changing [EMETH] to [METH] by destroying the [E]. The golem stops moving as according to the anecdote. Yes, like the anecdote from our world.

Probably not expecting this to end in an instant, the beautiful woman on the corner falls into confusion.
I ignore the woman and head toward the exit.

"You're careless!"

The beautiful woman attack with a rapier from behind while talking in monotone. It looks like she used some kind of reinforcing magic, her stab is reasonably faster than her level tells.
While being careful as not to break the woman's hand, I stop the rapier.

"Come to think of it, what is the reward for the winner anyway?"
"...Me?"

She tilted her head like before, and said so after hesitated for a bit. Why is it a question.

Apparently she didn't prepare any reward since she didn't think that I would win.
I make the woman faints, and take the rapier as the reward. Since the hilt design is cute, let's give it to Lulu or Zena-san as a present.

I lay the woman on the floor and advance ahead.

◇

Afterward, I arrived at the master room without any considerable setback. The latter half had traps, but since I avoided all of them with trap discovery skill, I didn't even know what kind of traps there were.

The magician is in the interior of the master room. There's Mia on the throne, but she seems to be still unconscious. Her HP has fully recovered, but her stamina is still only at about 30%.

"I really did not think that you would come this far so fast."
"Is that so? If possible I'd like to avoid fighting and just get Mia back."

The magician laughs.
I continue to step forward to the throne while talking. I'd rather not get thrown again into the underground lake if I ignore the magician.

"Impossible, that's impossible. You have shown your qualification by defeating the iron giant."

The magician's solo performance continues.

"However, your title is insufficient to go against me. I'll have you fight

formidable adversaries so you could gain the title 'Hero'. As for your reward, I'll give you this holy sword, Gjallarhorn."

The magician pull the sword on his hand.
The AR indicates that the sword is a holy sword, Gjallarhorn. Its performance is inferior compared to the holy swords I have, but it's still incomparable to common magic swords.

I don't understand this guy's real intention.
Does he really only want to commit suicide?

"Your opponents are them."

The magician's shadow expands to the center of the room as he speaks. And then, 3 iron golems appear from the shadow. Moreover, five beautiful women come out from the door beside the throne and line up behind the golems. Their faces are the same as the beautiful woman earlier, but since their hairstyles are different, they're probably not the same person.

"However, you would merely get killed by strong enemies like this, while the title hero is attained by overcoming life-and-death struggles."

From this guy's viewpoint, my level is 10. It shouldn't be possible to beat 3 level 30 golems.
The magician spreads his hands toward the heaven and continues his words.

"Therefore, I'll give everyone the blessing of my god--- Limit Break."

5-12. Maze of Trazayuya (3)

Satou's here. As I have always lived in the gluttonous Japan, I've never starved.
The wartime story in the olden days told by my great-grandmother felt like some kind of far away events.

◇

The purple aura gushing out from the magician not only wraps the women and the golems, but also me.

I check on the log for once, it seems that it was properly resisted. I didn't get the skill because it was probably a unique skill.

"Well then, I'm expecting a desperate struggle."

While saying so the magician runs his fingers on the maze core operation machine that looks like a music stand.
Walls come out to separate the throne from the hall in the master room. From the map, it doesn't seem to be simple walls, but other blocks from the maze who have moved here.

I tilt my neck to avoid a magic arrow going straight to my face.
I look at where the arrow flew from, the former beautiful women who have turned into demonic figures are there. The golems which are coming here while flinging their arms around have the same atmosphere.
I could kill them instantly, but I'd use the golem to understand how the magician's unique skill works.

While dodging one, the other is coming.
While maintaining our distance, I concentrate firing the rapid-fire magic gun on a leg of the golem. The leg was destroyed after about 10 firings.
The third golem manages to body blow me. My HP is only decreased in a

single digit although I don't know the exact value. Isn't it about as strong as wagahai-kun?
Its level is still 30, but did it get stronger equaling to twice its level? I defeated the golem in the large room with one hit back then, so I can't compare these ones with it. I should've have fought it properly.
Still, if the unique skill only strengthen its recipients to double their level then it's nothing to worry about.

I ward off the next blow from the third golem and make it hit the second instead. The second golem's head is destroyed, but the third golem's fist which it used to hit the other golem also got destroyed.
I see, [Limit Break] is just as it says.

Using this opportunity, the former beautiful women are unleashing magic arrows in rapid successions. The magic arrows are being fired from magic circles that appear in front of their foreheads.
I properly avoid them, but it seems that they can persistently home in on the target. I don't think that I could avoid them forever so I shoot them down with the rapid-fire magic gun.

The 5 of them fired a lot. They sure have quite the MP to keep on it.

The second golem which got its head destroyed is still able to move. And then, it points both of its open hands to me.
Don't tell me.

Slightly different from my expectation, the golem fires all 10 of its fingers like missiles. I can effortlessly dodge those, but they explode when it got close to me.
Putting aside physical damage to my body, my clothes became tattered.

The magic arrows that was floating and aiming on the air are rushing to me, fired by the former beautiful women.

The golem which match its timing with the arrows attack approaches me with its fist. The first to reach is the fist.

Since I'm afraid the gun is affected by the explosion earlier, I'm not going to use it.

I jump on the golem fist and make it as foothold, but the arrows are going to hit me.

I unfasten my mantle with the quickdressing skill, and fling it to the nearby pillar to change my trajectory--

--I managed to evade the arrows and the fist.

The arrows pierced the golem but it only reduced its HP by less than 10%.
Even if they hit me, they'd only do little damage but I hate pain.

Rather than that, the former beautiful women's states are strange. How do I say it, their movements are now looking more like zombies than demons.
They're saying something like "Uuu~", or "Aaa~", painfully so yet they keep shooting the magic arrows.

Since I'm worried with the condition of the women, I've decided to make quick works of the golems.
I throw fragments falling from the golem in super high speed. The golem is pulverized whole, don't even mention the letters on their foreheads.

While I'm throwing it, I see the figures of the former beautiful women being ruined in typical fashions.
While bleeding from their eyes and pores, they're unleashing giant magic arrows, no, spears from magic circles in front of their whole bodies.
If I don't quickly stun them, they would really die.

I impatiently fix my posture and face toward the women.
However, it was too late.

As the magic spears unleashes upon me, the women's lives also disappear.
When their HP gauges became zero, their life burst over like some kind of game characters.

I do not take evasive action against the five spears and let them pierce my body.

It hurts.

"Why did you go that far."

I don't know if the girls', who were artificial life forms, senses of life were the same as me, but it's sorrowful.
If I think about the meaning the magic arrows which were too many then...

I destroy the remaining two golems who were approaching by using the fragment of the first golem.
Both the golem and homonculus are artificially made, but since the golems looks like robots, I didn't hesitate in destroying them. Deep inside, I probably perceive golems as machines and homonculus as humans.

After all the enemies have been eliminated, the hall with me alone becomes once again connected with the throne on the master room.
I set the title as that guy desired.

◇

The magician's applause is echoing through the hall.

"That was splendid. Welcome, new hero."

The magician's shadow brings me the holy sword.
I can't see the face of the magician with bent back because of the rainbow colored light emitting from the maze core behind him.

"Is your purpose a hero?"
"Indeed."

"Then, couldn't you just go to the Saga empire without doing this roundabout charade?"

I asked with harsh voice. I've been shocked with the tragic deaths of the women, my heart has become restless.

"Fumu, Parion's hero eh. When I went there, the hero had been sent back home."
"Don't you know that there's a next generation?"
"Ah, so it's already that season eh. However, the time is not right."
"What do you mean?"
"You wouldn't understand even if I explain."

It seems that he won't answer.
While having the dialogue, I'm calming my heart down.

"Hey magician, do you really only want to die?"
"The right answer to that question should be no."
"I don't want to have a Zen dialogue."

Hearing that answer, the magician is laughing like a mad man.
Two purple lights lines are sipping through his hood.

"Kuhahaha, I see, so you're a comrade who has also come from the land of the god."
"I don't know any such country."

No wait, I think ancient Japan has been called that a long time ago.

"Kakakaka, it's useless to put on false front, what did you pray, wish, and desire from the ruthless god?"
"I did not hope for anything."

I haven't even meet one.

"If there was one, then I had wished for a rest I guess?"

I wished hard for that one.

"Fuhahaha, such selflessness. Truly worthy to be a hero."
"You, what did you wish for?"

Yes, why is your race not human.

"Don't you know it? Don't you see it? Yes, I am the king of night, an immortal existence. What I wished from the omnipotent god was a body that won't die, a live without starvation, and power to strike back at unreasonable violence."
"So that's why you were born with that body..."

The magician shakes his head while spreading his arms horizontally.

"You're reading too far. The god had let me reincarnated in a body of a healthy baby. And arranged me to be raised by good parents who I could respect, and met a pure lovely spouse who was more than I deserved."

Then, why?

"I became too accustomed with my new life. Even though I was robbed by unreasonable violence in my previous life, in this life it was done differently."

The magician takes off his hood.

"I was prisoned by a noble who fell in love with my wife and executed under false charge. The first view that I saw when I was resurrected in this figure was the head of my whole family starting with my parents in front of the castle. And underneath them was my broken doll-like corpse of my wife..."

Tears aren't dripping on his white cheeks.
Purple flames are raging from his eyes sockets.

"Your pity is unnecessary. I changed the corpses of my whole family into

undead, and along with the corpses of the people with the same circumstance as me, we bared our fangs toward the noble and completely destroyed everything."

There is no way for him to shed tears.
Because his figure is that of a white skeleton.

"I, who had completed my revenge, intended to depart to the next world where my wife is waiting. However, the blessing from the god cannot allow that. Even with the purification technique (Turn Undead), or with the holy sword that I got with much hardship, I wasn't able to die."

He said, "Truly god's blessing (curse)."

"Come now, hero. I've said all that need to be said. Stab me to bring my end! At the very least, kill me before even my heart turned into demon lord."

The magician Zen, no, Immortal King (No-Life King) Zen, said so.
<TLN: No-Life King is a direct katakana translation from the author so there's no other interpretation possible>

Accepting those words filled with insanity, I pull out the holy sword, Gjallarhorn.
It's a curious sword with drill-shaped edges.

I raise the sword as if praying, then stab No-Life King Zen with all my might.

"Kuha, kuhahaha. Ena, my other half of wings. I'm going to you now..."

Zen's body is destroyed by crumbling into dust.
The robe falls and spreads out on the ground.

I could faintly hear, "My gratitude", in the end.

>Title [No-Life King Slayer] acquired
>Title [Maze Traveler] acquired

5-13. Maze of Trazayuya (4)

Satou's here. Whenever I played a game for the first time I never skip any event until the end, maybe because my job was making games.
If the game is not to my liking, I didn't enjoy it until the end and went to dispose it on a second-hand store, Satou.

◇

"Kusukusukusu, it's a failure huh."
"Yup, a failure."

Two purple lights emerge from the crumbled remains of Zen.

"Goodbye, hero."
"This is your victory."

I reflexively cut those lights with the holy sword since I feel evil intent from them. However, the lights which had been scattered away gather themselves back and rise into the sky.

"Let's meet again."
"See you."

The lights penetrate the ceiling and disappear before long.

◇

Were those angels? I felt maliciousness from them though.
But, I don't have the leisure to think about it. Because--

『System Message. This maze will begin to enter into self-destruct sequence.

The staff members and trainee are to escape immediately. I repeat』

---I heard that announcement.
I rush to Mia and make her who's still unconscious to drink magic potion with restorative effect. Since the medicine hasn't been tested, I give her one third at a time. She wakes up exactly with one bottle.

"Mia, do you recognize me?"
"...Onii-chan?"

I am not.
Mia's blurred eyes become focused.

"Here is?"
"The master room of Trazayuya Maze."

Hearing me, Mia hurriedly look for the magician.

"It's alright, he is no more. He won't show up in front of you anymore."
"Really?"
"Yes really."

This is not the time to have a carefree talk like this.

『The self-destruct sequence has been executed. The staff members and trainee are to escape immediately.』

I have to stop it quickly.

"Mia, can you stop this maze from self-destructing?"
"I'll try."

Mia unsteadily walks to the operation board.
She tries to operate something for a while, but then she shakes her head.

"Impossible."

She gave up fast.

After asking for more detail from Mia, it seems that every functions has been locked somehow. So it's helpless even for the maze's master.

I somehow know that this maze would explode if I destroy the maze core.
Let's bet on my physical strength and escape by running then.

I carry Mia who has given up and staring at the floor under my arm.

"This will be dangerous, so hold me tight."

Without looking at Mia who's nodding, I run.

◇

I'm running through the passage.

Running.

And running.

At first, Mia was screaming loudly but she falls into silent now. It seems that she has fainted.
I mow down skeletons or ants which came out from time to time and continue to run. It's a bit tough to protect Mia from the falling debris.

We finally get to midway, the central room.

Inside the room, I take the still unconscious big-breasted beautiful woman (Homonculus) on my shoulder, on the opposite side where I hold Mia.

Even though I couldn't save her friends, I'll save one even for my own self-

satisfaction.
I'm a hypocrite if I do say so myself.

Even after carrying more luggages, my speed isn't falling. It just becomes a bit hard to keep the balance.
I jump through the trompe l'oeil stair with one leap.

Okay, it's just 4 levels left.

When I got there, I could feel vibration and hear thick explosion sounds from the depth.

『System Message, the Subsystem has been activated. The Maze Core has lost its power to support facilities due to entering self-destruct sequence. This maze will self-destruct soon. The staff members and trainee are to escape immediately. I repeat』

While listening to that robotic voice, my feet aren't stopping.

Damn, if there's a subsystem, then couldn't we stop the self-destruct there?
If only the map has the control room written or something.

I'm feeling eerie vibration from my feet, maybe the collapse is starting.

3 levels left.

A block falls in front of my eyes.
Without losing my momentum, I kick the falling block and make it flies to the other side.

I couldn't keep Mia and the woman unhurt while doing that kind of acrobatic feat. I'll let you two drink as many potions as you want when we get out so please bear with it for now.

2 levels left.

An especially strong vibration occurs, and makes the passage's turn just ahead to cave-in.
I look back the opposite side, but the upper level has collapsed too, blocking the path.

And, the ceiling here is also collapsing.

I put Mia and the woman on the ground near my feet.

I hold the ceiling with both my hands, but the ceiling breaks facing my crushing power. I protect Mia and the woman from the falling fragments.
Do we have no choice but to get buried like this?

A piece of the falling debris hits Mia. Mia's health decreases by 10%. The woman also only has 30% remaining.

『The trainee's health has decreased. In accordance to the top priority of training program, ejecting the trainee outside the maze. Other trainees are to be separated from the particular trainee as to not get dragged into the teleportation.』

Is this what the Trazayuya guy mean in his memo?

◇

The three of us succeeded escaping with the safety program for trainee (elf). I'm apologizing for making fun of the over protectiveness inside my mind.

I make Mia to drink the homemade potion. I let the woman drinks one too while I'm at it. The AR shows that the woman only has No.7 on its name's row. She doesn't have an actual name huh.

I recognize this place but I'll check the map just to be sure. It's near the place where I got out of the Trazayuya maze master room.

I see a cliff with water strongly gushing out of it. That's probably water overflowing from the underground lake.
The water flow becomes weak while I look at it, so I jump to the cliff and check on the map.
There may be someone who needs help.

According to the map, the survivors are me and one other. Slime-kun lives on it seems. There's no other survivor huh.

But in just a moment, the slime's HP is exhausted.
Rest in peace.

Right at that time.

The log begins to flow with great speed.
This hasn't happened since the time with meteor shower.

I scroll through the loot on the log. "Defeated all enemies on the map" is written there. I see, so this is the condition to trigger <<Automatic Loot>>.

There is no [Source] thing this time.

I move all the new loot to Trazayuya Maze folder.
Most of them are the remains of monsters and broken machineries.
There are also several magic books, they're probably magician Zen's belonging right?

Since the vibration still continue, the collapse probably is still continuing, I go back to where Mia and the woman are.

>Title [Survivor] Acquired

5-14. Joining

Satou's here. I want riddle to be called mystery.
With this brutal adventure life, I'm saying goodbye to carefree sightseeing trip, Satou.
<TLN: If you haven't noticed, these "Satou's here" preludes will only get weirder lol>

◇

Zen, Zen, Zen huh, I was overwhelmed by his drive, and made to dance according to his plan. He was probably satisfied, but it was a real nuisance to get involved.

Still, even though I've murdered someone because of the course of the event, I don't feel any remorse. It's not just because of my high MND but probably also because his outer appearance was that of a skeleton and he looked happy in the end.

I pull myself together. First, let's check on Arisa and the girls' situation. It seems that Liza is a bit hurt but everyone is safe. They're not in the camping ground but already near Seryuu city.
Somehow they thought that, "When it's morning", meant that they should get to the worker's guild before morning. I meant to say, "Depart when it's morning", but it was difficult to complete it.

I could tell them my safety if we have cellphones, but it can't be helped if it doesn't exist. Let's look for something with the same function when we got to the royal capital and labyrinth city.

Now then, it'd be difficult to traverse through 5 mountains when it's this dark. Putting aside my physical strength, my mental state is weary. I want to rest at least until dawn.

Should I take a rest until dawn here?

I've thought of heartless things, when I think about it, I remember that I shouldn't leave Arisa and the girls alone. If they, slaves they are, come back alone then wouldn't they be treated as escaped slaves?
The knight Soun who guards the front gate is a big hearted person, but I'm not sure if that applies to slaves and demi-humans too.

My health is already fully recovered, and my stamina is still at 90% anyway.
I hate to think like an athlete, but let's psyche myself up.
Of course I'll also take Mia, who I'm carrying on my shoulder, and No.7 (homonculus) along. If I leave them here, they'd fall preys to wolves then there'd be no point in me saving them from the maze.

I wrap Mia and No.7 each in thick sheets. By chance, Mia now looks like at the time when she was first handed to me by the red-helmet.

>[Packing Skill Acquired]

I put Mia on top of No.7, and carry both of them on my arms. They call this, bridal carry. If I have common physical strength I'd be down in just a few minutes, but the me now could carry them for many hours without problem.
When I try to walk, Mia almost slips out so I wrap one more mantle on the two to stabilize them.

I push my way through the mountain road while carrying the two.

◇

I haven't even run through the mountain road for a few minutes before, like usual,

>[Off-Road Skill Acquired]

comes up, so I put points to it until the maximum and activate it. Incidentally, I also enable the [Sprint] skill in similar manner. I might be wasting points but there's still about 90% of it remaining so it's fine.

I've been thoughtlessly using them up until now, but seeing those purple lights, I feel like I'd get involved with troubles. I've decided to carefully examine each of my skills and use half of my points to strengthen myself after I've reunited with Arisa and the girls.

I'm passing over a place that looks like the ruins of rat-man village after 10 minutes of running. Was this the village where Mia met the red-helmet again? I'm interested, but I have to keep going through the mountain now.

I can somehow identify good thickets to jump from, I wonder if this is thanks to off-road skill. I can't tell it as clearly as the trap-discovery skill could to traps, is this because the difference in natural and man-made things?
Probably thanks to the off-road skill added with sprint skill, I'm even considerably faster than a horse-drawn wagon. Moreover, combined with 3D-maneuver skill, I'm passing through the mountain almost in a straight line. I feel like some kind of ninja from a manga.

After crossing two mountains, dead trees begin to decrease and greeneries are becoming rich.

At such time, I see interesting place with shinning lily of the valley-like flowers and flickering mushrooms on the middle of the way. I want to look closer but time is precious now, so I give up. Since it's regrettable, I put a marker on the map for the place.
Mia and the woman sometimes get tangled with branches that stick out but I destroy it by flicking coins with my hand.
I run through the mountain relying on the moonlight. It feels like the moon in this world is awfully bright.

After the fourth mountain, a Giant Boar jumps on me. I've noticed it on the radar, but since it suddenly jumps here, I just kick it away.
I've been avoiding small animals who jump my way so far, but as expected,

it's impossible to do so with a bear-sized giant boar.
Its head which got hit directly went with a splat, I averted my eyes. Without looking at its scattered head, I put it into the storage before it falls onto the ground as a souvenir for Liza. Since I've seen Liza dismantling it several times already, I may have become accustomed it. Even though I'm boasting now, I'm confident that I'd have abandoned it if it was not dark.

And then we finally get to the highway. From here, it's 80 kilometers away to Seryuu city in straight line. There's one and half hour until dawn.
I run pass the hilly areas in straight line. The grounds are scooped out but no one would mind it anyway, probably.

◇

I'm thinking while running. The thing with Arisa and Zen, I feel I have a luck (Hard Luck) that gets me tend to be involved with humans who have been given power by the gods. I can't think that they're all existences with good will.

Does the gods in this world enjoy themselves by giving people trial?
Or, are they like mythological gods from Northern Europe and Greece where they have human-like trait with both evil and good?
No, there's also possibility of devils pretending to be gods like in the bible.

There's no answer with just just guessing. Later in our journey, let's look for more information about gods if I see a big temple or library.
Then I could compare the informations I got to Arisa's own.

Still, seeing this trend, there are other reincarnated people out there right?
And even with them around, this world's culture and civilization didn't collapse huh.
Maybe the people who were chosen were like me, who actively does not intend to spread modern-world knowledge.
People who love conspiracy theory probably would say that the reincarnated

person who's spreading modern-world knowledge would be removed by some kind of power.

Now then, the magician Zen said that he became No-Life King after he was executed by a noble.
What I'm worried about when I heard that story is my unique skill [Indestructible]. They sounds too similar. I'm afraid that I'd also become No-Life King or Demon Lord if my HP becomes zero.
<TLN: I translated it as Immortal back then, but it's more appropriate to be Indestructible so I'll change it for now. We'll see how the author play this out.>

Were the skills I saw from Zen in camping ground, like [Physical Attack Invalid] or [Instant Recovery] unique skills? Maybe it was because of those two skills that he wasn't able to kill himself.
This is only a guess from what I gathered from his talks, but [Hero] title combined with a holy sword are probably able to invalidate the two skills. Perhaps the demon lord has the same requirement too, or am I just thinking too much?

However, in comparison I was able to completely annihilate the heavenly dragons and the dragon god without any title. The meteor shower might have the same effect as [Hero and holy sword], but I feel that conclusion is too light.
I think that the dragons may be existences that hunt the demon lords, but they may also be a race that specialize in attack. I'm not really satisfied with this, but until I get new informations, let's conclude that for now.

◇

While recollecting the things that I talked about with Zen, I remember to put my title back to [None]. While I'm at it, I also change my level on the Exchange tab. Since Arisa and Liza have leveled up, I also raise my level to 12.

The growth of Arisa and the girls are like these

Arisa.... Level 10=>12, Skills are omitted
Lulu... Level 2=>3, Skills are [Etiquette], [Marshalling(new)]
Liza... Level 13=>14, Skills are [Spear], [Thrusting], [Dismantling], [Cooking], [Heavy Blow(new)]
Pochi... Level 13=>14, Skills are [Short Sword], [Throwing], [Dismantling], [Enemy Search], [Shooting(new)]
Tama... Level 13=>14, Skills are [Short Sword], [Throwing], [Dismantling], [Collecting], [Enemy Search]

Lulu's new skill [Marshalling] is not bad, but I'd have loved if she learned [Cooking].
In a game, you could assign skill for party members but reality isn't so convenient.

Come to think of it, I have [Education] skill if I recall right.
Maybe I could teach intended skills with this? I'll work together with Lulu to try it next time.

◇

I'm looking at the map every 10 minutes, but there's still nothing but me in this highway. Arisa and the girls have arrived in front of the Seryuu city's gate.
I've done an impossible thing by getting to the place where I could see Seryu city in 40 minutes. I'd say that my speed was 120 KM/H in average.
Since I lowered my speed when I reached highway as not to break them, you could guess yourself what my speed was on the hills.

When I got out of the last forest I began to walk normally since I could possibly be seen by the Seryuu city's scouts.
There are only 3 kilometers left anyway, and the gate isn't going to open for

50 minutes.

I came into a slightly elevated place 2 kilometers away from Seryuu city. I could not only see the outer wall from here, but also the entire gate. Our wagon can be seen in a distant.
While I look at it, the wagon starts to come toward here. Apparently, someone has seen me. The one with sharp eye, Tama I wonder?

The wagon comes into my view, Liza is operating it. Pochi and Tama lean out of the wagon as if they're about to fall and are waving at me. Arisa and Lulu are anxiously looking toward here, seems that they can't see me yet.
I put Mia and the woman on one of my arm smoothly, and then I wave back at them.
Still, everyone look strange. I've thought that they would worry about me but aren't they worrying too much?

Before long, the wagon comes into view while raising dust clouds.
I put the two on the side of the road and go to greet everyone.

The wagon makes a sudden stop, then Pochi and Tama who descend like they're tumbling down run here.
Bam, with that sound, Liza who jumps over Pochi and Tama from the coachman's seat runs here first. "Mafter", she says in a loud muffled cry while strongly hugging me. Losing her body weight, I support her center of gravity. Liza is crying like a flood while hugging me.
While I was surprised with Liza's unexpected behavior, Pochi and Tama climb up my body and Liza and hug me from both sides.

"Wlcome~""Nano desu!"

Maybe because they can't express their relief well, they're thoroughly play-biting my head and shoulders, and licking my face. This is intense.

Arisa and Lulu who come down from the wagon late aren't able to interrupt the intense hugs. "Welcome home.", said Arisa while looking at the ground, and said Lulu gracefully.

"I'm home, I'm sorry to worry you."

Liza is still crying while hugging me, but when she hears my voice she replies with a weak tearful voice. And then, seemingly aware that she's hugging me, she shyly parts away from me.
Matching her, I put Tama and Pochi on the ground and pat their heads.

"We were worried nodesu!""Any injury~?"

Pochi and Tama look at me worryingly, Lulu is looking at me while smiling, and then Arisa pushes to the front while still looking a bit at the ground.
She's not like the usual Arisa?

"...I, I was worried! Mou, promise me to never do something that absurd ever again!!"

Arisa resolves herself to raise her face and come up with words. Tears are swelling up on her large eyes.
I gently hug her while apologizing, and lightly pat her back.
She seemingly isn't able to hold back anymore, begins crying, and I comfort her. Maybe because they're swept away with it, Pochi and Tama also begin to cry together with Arisa. Lulu and Liza who look on us from a distance are also moved to tears.

I've decided to apologize for how many time, however many, until everyone stops crying. The pouring tears and scolding from everyone who was worried about me, warm my slightly hardened heart. And then, I continue to apologize until the sky turns white.

5-15. Joining (2)

Satou's here. It's not my intention to, but I can't help but lock on it when big breasts are presented in front of me.
Wanting a stout heart that won't lose to temptation, Satou's.

◇

I wonder if Arisa feels refreshed after crying her eyes out, she immediately asks me barrages of questions about my circumstance. I put aside the hard to talk things like about hero thing, or the purple lights, or reincarnated person and only roughly explain about how the magician has accomplished his goal and won't after Mia with the ants and monsters.

"Uuu~, you're hiding various things from me right?"
"Well yeah, I'll tell you about it when the time is right."

It's not exactly pleasant but it concerns Arisa too so I'll talk about it with her when it's only the two of us.

"Promise me! I'm fine doing it during our bed talk too."

It's good that she's back to her usual self.
I unwrap Mia and No.7 and put them on the wagon.

"Wait a minute, leaving aside the elf girl, what is this busty beautiful woman? Tell me what you were you talking about with the magician~~~!"

Arisa's screams are echoing.
Since it likely would reach Seryuu city, I stop her.

"You understand right? The identity of this person!"

Arisa nods to my words. Since the woman's real nature is a homonculus.
Mia finally wakes up from this uproar, and looks around unsteadily.

"...A dream?"
"It's not."
"Are we saved?"
"Narrowly, yes."

Mia's expression is changing while responding briefly. I tell to her what I told Arisa.

"I do not know the courtesy of humans. My mother who was with me for more than 100 years said that even though she didn't explain anything to me, I would understand that it's different when I go outside."

Oh, Mia is speaking with long sentences.

"If I may, a 『Thank you』 is enough. If the other person is a young man, then say it together with a laugh and a smile."

Arisa readily answers to Mia. Something isn't right though?

I see now, Mia was talking in Shiga kingdom language. When I ask her later, she's able to talk it right from the beginning. When I ask her why she didn't use it, I get the, 『Human language make feels like I'm talking while clattering, I hate it』, nuance from her answer.

Mia stands up, corrects her appearance and bows politely.

"Thank you, Satou."
"You're welcome."

Come to think of it, this is the first time I'm thanked by Mia.
I reply back without making fun of it.

"Let me introduce myself once more. I am the youngest elf of Bornean forest,

daughter of Lamisauya and Lilinatoa, Misanalia Bornean."

While saying, "You have my utmost gratitude.", she kisses my forehead.

>Title [Friend of the Elves] Acquired

◇

"This woman is?"
"Oh yeah, I forgot about it. You got more woman again?"
"Master is filthy."
"Matter of course huh."

After the event with Mia ends, the topic returns to no.7.
Mia, Arisa, and Lulu are speaking like I'm a husband who's caught cheating.
I shake No.7 who faints looking so happy.

"...Good morning?"
"Yup, good morning. Do you understand the situation?"
"Please wait a moment."

She spoke without intonation like always. She's contemplating while tilting her head to one side, seems it's her habit.
Since Arisa who's nearby says, "Gross", I straighten her up.

"An instruction remains in the message queue. Since the previous master has died, My ownership has been resigned as a result. According to other records, you have the qualification to be the new master."

No.7 stops there and waits for my answer.
Well, I won't complain if a big-breasted beautiful woman become our companion. Her master, Zen, has died and there probably aren't anymore of her friends remain.

Before I can open my mouth, Arisa reacts first. "No, that's not how it is.", she says to No.7, pulls her behind the wagon and talks secretly with her.

"Master, please sit here~ Everyone else sit here~"

After that, I'm going along with Arisa's favorite small theatric play. It's a parody of some kind but I don't know what it is at all. Then, while I'm still confused, it becomes that No.7 calls me master while she gets [Nana] as her new name.
<TLN: Nana means seven, yes, Satou's terrible at naming people lol>

Although Arisa gives me a look when she heard the name, I'd like you to spare me on this since I don't have any naming sense.
I don't understand the meaning for the small drama until the end but No.7's title has changed from [Zen's Doll] to [Satou's Servant], so there might some kind of profound meaning to it.

"Please take care of me from now on, Nana."
"Yes, master. From now on, please treat me well."

...What did you teach this time, Arisa.

◇

After getting a new companion, I decided to take Mia to the manager of worker's guild. Mia has someone from the same tribe to rely on, unlike the other girls.

Since my deeds to stay in Seryuu city is still valid, I can enter the gate without tax. And since it doesn't seem possible for this to apply to other members, I go alone to call the manager.

"Hello, Nadi-san."
"Hello. Eh? Satou-san, didn't you depart yesterday?"

"Yes, actually a lost elf child has fallen under my care, so I'm making a visit here thinking in borrowing the manager's help."
"You're a good person, you even come back for that."

Nadi-san greeted me pleasantly, but I feel like the last one is mixed with a bit of shock.

"The manager is still asleep, so I'll wake him for you. Please make yourself comfortable on this sofa while you wait."

While saying that, Nadi-san briskly cleans up menswear and magazine-like books on the sofa to make some spaces. They're most likely the manager's. While I wait, I pick up a magazine-like book. It's a gossip magazine that cover Shiga kingdom related topic. There aren't more than 10 pages, but I flip through it since I feel nostalgic. Articles such as the outcome of love between a noble girl and an explorer somewhere, or map for 'service' on the royal capital are abundant.

I'm hearing the sound of Nadi-san who wakes the manager up from the floor above.
The two come downstairs when I'm reading an article about competition of some famous fighters in an arena.

"I'm sorry to disturb you."
"...Where is she?"
"Mou, manager! When you talk to an ordinary person, please talk more properly. I'm sorry, Satou-san. Where is the elf girl?"

I thought that he was in bad mood for being woken up back then, but this guy is just taciturn huh. Maybe elves default character are taciturn?
I guide the two to the open space outside the gate where my wagon is waiting. The worker's guild wasn't put with [Closed] signboard or something, was that alright?

I ask Lulu who was in the coachman's stand to call Mia.

"Mia? I can't believe it, the lost child is Misanalia?"
"Yes, do you know her?"
"Ah."

He could speak fluently when he was speaking to himself but it's just a word for the reply huh? Nadi-san looks at the manager with troubled face. I see, I understand now why this guy is always sleeping in the store.

"Yuya?"
"Mia."
"Nn."
"Ran away?"
"No."
"Lost"No""
"Lia?"
"House."
"I see."
"Why?"
"...Cleaning up."

Their words exchanges in elf language are interesting. I can guess the intentions but I'd like an interpreter for the actual conversations. Mia only denies when it's about being lost, then they continue to mutually understand. With the help of Nadi-san, I generally understand their conversations. Manager(Yuya)-san is an elf who comes from the same hometown as Mia. He came to Seryuu city 10 years ago to clean up the mess that his granduncle had created. He didn't mention it, but it's most likely about the Trazayuya maze.
I report to him about the thing with the magician who kidnapped Mia. He had an underground hideout in the rat-man's territory which looks like a maze, and that when we escaped from it, the maze self-destructed burying it along with the magician.

"Go home?"
"Won't"
"I see."

"Have work to do."

Nadi-san became a bit anxious with the flows of the story, but she was back to be beaming with smiles after hearing the manager's words.

"What do?"
"Go home."
"Can you?"
"Together with Satou."

It seems that the manager asked if she could go back home, but Mia said that she'd be fine with me. Really, they could understand well with just that. If you're acquainted with someone for more than 100 years, I guess you'd end up understanding what each other is thinking.

Lastly, the manager tells me, "I'm counting on you". Then the manager and Nadi-san
pulls us along when they're going back to their shop, and negotiate with the knight Soun to make ID for Mia. I consult with the two if they can do something to make Nana able to create an ID, and the manager says, "Leave it to me.", while using magic art, [Fake Patch], to camouflage Nana's tribe into [Human].
At the same time, the manager warns us that this magic can only deceive replica Yamato stone while the original which was present when we got out of the labyrinth back then and Status Check ability could see through it.
By the way, the AR shows me, [Tribe: Human][Tribe: Homonculus], when I look at Nana, while appraisal skill gives me, [Tribe: Human (Fake)].

For the time being, thanks to the manager and Nadi-san, the two got their ID safely. With this we'll be able to visit towns in the middle of our journey.
When we're waiting for the ID to finish, the manager gives me a bag containing money while saying, "Nn".

"Please use this for Mia's travel expense. Though it's only a little since it's manager's secret saving."
"Said too much."

The manager complains with the added information from Nadi-san.

"I'll gratefully receive it."

I receive it and put it on the pouch.
We don't particularly need it, but it would be rude to decline this. I'll give it all to Mia later.
I promise the manager and Nadi-san who see us to send them a letter when we get to the forest.

The wagon advances through the same road as yesterday.
I pray for this to become a peaceful journey with nothing happening, and the wagon continues one while rattling.

Intermission: At Territorial Army

I hear rustling noise of equipments.
Uuu~, the break is already over huh.

The punctual Iona hasn't woke me up, which mean there's still time. I'll enjoy dozing off for a little more.

"Guhaaa!"

What are you doing to a helpless beautiful girl.
A chain mail is suddenly thrown onto my stomach, I get up while moving it aside.

"Hey Ruu. Wake me up more gently."

I complain to the only possible culprit, Ruu.
Iona and Zena-chi never do it like this.

"Just get up already. You're running out of the time to take a meal you know."

What!? I can't let that happen.
I get up and wash my face. Since it's troublesome to use the ladle, I draw water from water basin to the jug directly. If Iona and Zena-chi found out about this, they'd scold me.

"What's on the menu today?"
"Seems black bread and stew."
"Eeeh~ I'd like goat meat or steak sometimes."
"What's with those luxuries, even captain-class doesn't get them."

I amuse myself with the chats while wiping my face with my favorite towel.

"If I became a mistress of a noble, would I be able to eat them everyday~?"
"Nowadays, looks like even nobles have it rough, so you probably won't get many delicious things too?"

Iona doesn't dream big eh~ even though she's from a branch family of a noble. Guess that's why her excitement has been dulled~

I throw my pajama which is a knee-length shirt on top of the bed, and take out an underwear and armors from my own shelf.

"Oi, Lilio. Don't show me your dirty ass."
"What a rude thing to say~ even though it's this cute."

You don't have to see it, Ruu.
It's not like I like I'm an exhibitionist, so I wear my underwear. I'm wearing a short shirt on my top. Ruu and Iona wear breast wraps. Unfortunately, me and Zena-chi don't have much need for ones.
Of course I'd wear a cute shirt and breast wrap when I go on a date, but that's only if I have a boyfriend. I wear armor on the top anyway, it'd only be painful to wear an unneeded breast wrap.

After I finish wearing the chain mail, I put on the sturdy metal-reinforced leather boots and Zena-chi comes just right after.

Ara, how cute.
What she's wearing is Iona's if I'm not mistaken, with lots of frills, Iona's charm point is how showy she is. Isn't that the clothes she was boasting about when she bought it after saving up for half a year.
Good grief, everyone is sweet to Zena-chi.

I've thought that Zena's done changing and have taken a seat on the cafeteria already, but wearing that clothes, don't tell me.

"Zena-chi, you had a date with the boy right?"
"Da... n, no. He was worried about something so we were just having a talk."

That's what you call a date.
Still, seeing your beloved while lacking sleep due to the current overloaded working condition, how lovable.

"Lilio, your hands have stopped. If you don't change fast, you'll really miss your meal you know?"
"Hoo~i."

Reproved by Iona, I continue wearing my clothes.
Zena-chi folds a pink stole really carefully on top of the bed.

Oh? Isn't that the newest color from Pinen clothing store from the center district?
Zena-chi is certainly a noble, but I don't think a daughter of a noble lineage could be that extravagant.

"Zena-chi, what's with that stole? Don't tell me, it's a gift from the boy?"
"Ehehe~."

Uwah, Zena's face is becoming lovestruck.

"I was given it by Satou-san. It was a product from Pinen-san's store Lilio told me back then~."

You're amazing, boy. Even cheap things in that place should be around 2-3 silver coins.
I wonder if he's a stupid son of a large store owner from somewhere? I pray that Zena isn't being played.
She's taking off her clothes, and I let it slide when she stealthily unfasten her breasts paddings. It was a date after all, some charms were needed for woman right.

"Zena-san, please change your clothes quickly too. Since we won't make it for the meal, do you want me to make some sandwiches?"
"No, I already had a meal, so I'm alright."
"Did you have a feast?! You had a feast right~~~."

After Zena-chi finished taking off her clothes, she gives it to Iona and she's closing on me while fetching her equipments.

"I did not. I just had some sweets while teaching Satou-san how to chant."

I am being dragged by Ruu and Iona to the cafeteria while Zena-chi is speaking fondly, "When I was going to sit down on a bench, he laid out a handkerchief on it you know."
Oh no, isn't that guy quite a playboy?

◇

The next day, I'd be on the bed all day since I'm off-duty, but I change my clothes and go out.

The sweets reserve in my room has ran out. Zena-chi is on duty today, and she's going to guard until midnight today just because she can use magic. Since it'd be pitiful if there's no sweets when she gets back, this kind Lilio-sama will buy it for her.

Well~, it's important for a popular woman to be attentive!

There's a familiar figure on the plaza in front of the castle.
It's the boy--- Zena-chi's beloved. He's wearing an expensive-looking clothes like usual. Looks like he's back from shopping, he's carrying a lot of books. If you buy that many, you could just hire a manservant.

Since my mischievous heart grows excited, I creep on his back and talk to him while imitating Zena.

"Hello, nimble Onii-san."

The boy turns around and speaks normally. Tsk, he's not surprised huh.

"Hello, Lilio-san. Did you imitate Zena-san?"
"Ehehe~ Did I pass? Hey hey, did you skip a beat?"

Ooh~ he remembers his girlfriend's best friend's name even though he meet me only once. No~ It's hard to be beautiful~ What should I do if he's fallen for me.

"Are you alone today?"
"Yep, the other soldiers are sleeping~ But Zena, from yesterday noon until midnight today, is keeping on guard the who~le time. Magic troops are lacking in number isn't it."

It looks like he wants to talk with me, but it doesn't seems like he's going to seduce me. He's not making a pass to this beautiful me, that means maybe he's not flirtatious?
Since the topic is about Zena-chi.

"Lilio-san, could you deliver a message for Zena-san?"
"Okay~ But no passionate lines that would make chest hot okay? If it's too intense, it might be interpreted wrong you know~."

I don't want to whisper love words to Zena-chi. Although since we're in women barrack, something like that do occasionally happen, because we live for friendship.

"I've decided to go to the labyrinth city for a business trip."

That's quite far. Isn't that on the far-most side of this country?

"Hee~ you're going on a long expedition again huh."
"Yes, I've stocked goods which are in shortage there."
"That so~, you're a merchant after all. When are you departing?"
"That, I plan to depart early morning tomorrow."

Acha~ Zena's first love end up unrequited huh~.
Let's treat her something next time.

"I understand, I'll properly convey it."

"Yes, I'm counting on you."

After saying so, the boy nods and leaves with a horse-drawn carriage away.

◇

When I get back to the barrack, everyone are gathering and having talks in the cafeteria. It's still a long time before the meal, is there something happening?
I ask the squad who are talking beside me.

"Yana-chi, did something happen?"
"Ah, Lilio, listen to this."

It's a good choice to ask Gayana-chi who loves to talk. They're told that the territorial army has announced the application for personnel selection for deployment in the labyrinth city. The deployment is going to take two months.

But, even though they say that it's training, in actuality it's about hunting monsters in the haunts right?
I will absolutely pass on this~.

However, judging from the buzz around, there are a lot of people who want to go. It seems that they add one silver coins for each month on the pretext of training. It's an amount that couldn't be ignored for us, underpaid soldiers. Furthermore, looks like the sales of magic cores we get from the labyrinth will be split equally for soldiers.
The danger is great, but the return is just as big. Danger is everywhere anyway. Even a senior demon appeared recently during my normal duty in Seryuu duty. If the silver mask-sama hadn't arrived at that time, I would be six-feet under right now.

That reminds me, the boy is going to the labyrinth city.

This is just right, I could aid Zena-chi's love while getting rich, let's apply for the selection.
Since Zena-chi won't be back until midnight, let's talk to Ruu and Iona first.
Ruu isn't going to complain as long as she could get stronger, and Iona is unexpectedly greedy, she should be easy to persuade.

I don't know if we'd get selected, but let's work hard~.

Intermission: Labyrinth and Fairy

"Sensei! Houya and the others had gone to the goblin's nest!"

The one who boorishly breaks this elegant afternoon tea time is the home fairy (Brownie) entrusted with taking care of this ivy mansion, Giril.
Giril who's usually very calm is panicking with popping eyes.

It's not the time for me to be so calm. I wear my familiar magic clothes made from Yuriha fiber and take my favorite cane with one hand, then I go out. At the outside, my attendant who has already completed his preparation, Dohar--a very sturdy Dwarf--accompanies me to the labyrinth on the outskirts of Selbira.

This comes a bit late, but I'm a nature art user who hails from Bornean forest and the one who has broken through level 50 after devoting myself for 500 years. The name is Trazayuya Bornean. Recently, I've been called elf sage instead of my name.

"Boss, the kids seem to have taken the chick kids."
"I see."
"It seems they want to be acknowledged by the chick kids."
"Let's hurry."
"Hei!"

The kids Dohar mentions are someones who have followed me here from Bornean forest, Houya-- Houlsetaya, along with 5 others young elves. They, who were level 5-6 when they first got here, have approached level 20 in rapid growth now. They're young ones with bright futures. Since there are a lot of elves who finish their lives uneventfully without even crossing level 10, they're worth to be specially mentioned. They're a bit thoughtless but it can't be helped since they're still young, being less than 300 years old. They will settle down with time.
They'll grow up, become more discreet, before long they will pass over me, and if they gain influence in the world, the elves position will also go up. That is my very wish. To have the elves regain back the leadership of the

world is my dream.

At the end of last month, around 15 young elves had come asking for my guidance, I wondered if the news about the kids' rapid growth had traveled to the hometown. They're clearly younger than Houya and the others. The youngest one is my distant nephew, Yusalatouya, at only 150 years old.

I've thought of making them into a group of five people and let Dohar makes them get accustomed with the labyrinth but it seems that Houya and the others have taken them to the labyrinth to brag themselves. Another reason is probably the fair-looking Lulilutoa who's also a master of Lute-playing being one those who've arrived recently. Appealing to women is a common thing regardless of age or race after all.

Dohar shows his red metal explorer plate to the gatekeeper who guards the entrance to the labyrinth on the west side of Selbira. That gatekeeper has known us since he was a new recruit, but he has never not checked for the plate for the past 20 years. It's quite commendable, but since right now I'm worried with the safety of the young ones, I can't help but feel annoyed. I'm still lacking in discipline.

After we're finished with the checking, we descend the stairway to come into semi-basement and continue through the passage. The passage is 10 meter wide and 5 meter high which meanders for about 2 Km. They made it to be twisted so when monsters overflow from the labyrinth, they would be slowed down.
One meter above is the ceiling that acts like dormer window that could be opened, while soldiers are patrolling outside. This 2 kilometers passage are used to preemptively shoot to death monsters which could come out overflowing from the labyrinth.
Thanks to this, "Passage of Death", the labyrinth's monsters have never got to Selbira.

Dohar and I begin to run while calming down my restless mind. I don't want to get mistaken with monster if I carelessly make noise in this passage. It's especially dangerous for Dohar since he's short.

Dohar opens the labyrinth's gate after we finally arrive there. I'm powerless against this heavy gate.

◇

"The kids are going to sweep the goblin's nest, they said."
"I understand."

There are many goblin's nest inside this labyrinth, but they probably went to the so-called fairy area infested with plant monsters, an unpopular area.
Ones will have to defeat the troublesome plant monsters, because they act as obstacles, to get to the goblins' location. Plant monsters have high stamina, and they're hard to deal without someone with fire magic in your party. And even if you defeat them, their magic cores are buried deep in the ground, it's not possible to dig out. They're monsters that embody the saying, "Great pains but all in vain." Since it's not worth the effort, the cores are rare to come by as alchemy materials.
Making use of their unpopularity, I made a tunnel straight to that goblin's place using nature art and alchemy to act as an exclusive hunting ground for the young elves.

I've planted Gabo fruits for the goblin's welfare and breeding and eliminated other monsters beside goblins with Dohar.
Now then, I've called them goblins so far, but the ones in this labyrinth are not the wicked fairy goblins but pseudo-goblins that have magic cores inside their body. The wicked fairy goblins have dark green body and bleed red blood, they're fairies who are hated everywhere while the pseudo-goblins can't speak, have dark body and bleed green blood, they're genuine monsters.
The wicked fairy goblins don't exist in this continent for 200 years except in one region, since they are hunted all the same with the pseudo-goblins.
Therefore, ironically, what most people refer as goblins are actually pseudo-goblins.

◇

Dohar takes care of monsters who occasionally appear in one blow with his battle axe. He's already working as my attendant for nearly 100 years. He was overjoyed as he recently had managed to break through level 40, passing his father.

"Boss, it's basilisk."
"I understand. ■■■ Magic Arrow."

I unleash 21 magic arrows toward the basilisk appearing from the back. There are 21 magic arrows, where usually even one is hard to resist. The basilisk becomes pieces of meats without being able to do anything.

"Is it a stray?"
"Yes, basilisks usually appear 5 level below. Some stupid young explorers who overestimated their abilities most likely had gone to the depth and drew one here."
"You're right."

This is troubling. Low level people won't be able to resist Basilisk petrification. The one we encountered just now was just a lower basilisk so it couldn't turn someone into stone, but I don't know if they could take its stare without getting their hearts stopped.

Near the end of the tunnel, we meet a herd of goblins. They're only level 1-3 but it's a herd consisting of around 30 monsters. It's annoying to wait for Dohar defeating them so I provide assistance with magic arrow.

"Boss, for the goblins to appear around this place, that means-"
"Umu."

I briefly answered Dohar's guess. I've scattered medicine that would make goblins think there are strong monsters so they don't go near the tunnel

entrance. If they go far past it, then that means the foods don't suffice.

"This is bad."
"Yea, the kids 'ere in danger if we don't get to 'em fast."

The labyrinth monsters periodically enter breeding season. Goblin's period is short, but in exchange their propagation rate rarely change. However their propagation rate is huge, so it can't be helped if there's a calculation error.

...I remember something unpleasant. Last month, Giril mentioned that the reserve Gabo seeds in the storehouse had gone. The storehouse wasn't locked so poor people occasionally stole Gabo fruit from there, so I had just thought, "Again huh", when I heard it.
I've left the job of sowing Gabo seeds here to Houya and the others, but I wonder if they properly follow my order to do it with one small bag? If they sowed the three small-barrels worth of Gabo seeds that were in the storehouse...

I must hurry. If my prediction is true, the goblins may have started breeding explosion. If it really happens then 30 baby goblins could be born by eating the stomach of their mother goblin. And then the children would start breeding again in two weeks. If we're unlucky, we might be facing ten of thousands goblins.

When we finally arrive at an open space, countless bodies of goblins and three dead bodies of the young elves come into our views.

"Regrettable."
"Boss, please save the remorse until we get out of the labyrinth."

I accept Dohar's advice and advance forward.
We smash through the goblins that have clogged up the tunnel. Since we can't avoid the plant monsters, I use nature art <<Enhance Sharp Edge>> on Dohar's battle axe and continue on while he's cutting them.

We finally arrive at a location that could only be called painting from hell

littered with corpses as far as eyes can see.
While clearing the goblins corpses with magic and a thin sword, I see the tragic corpses of the young elves full of goblin's teeth marks.

I call the young ones' name several times.

However, no one answers back. Whenever Dohar swings his battle axe, the goblin corpses increase. I deal with three goblins who rush towards me by deploying the <<Floating Wheel>> for my self-protection.

Boom, we hear explosion sounds from the back of the room.

"Dohar."
"Yea, boss."

We act in harmony, making ways through the sea of goblin to the place where the sound comes from.
To back Dohar, I give him reinforcement magic. They're Strength and Dancing Blade.
Strength multiply Dohar's strength several folds allowing him to tear through goblins like a tornado. Dancing Blades is small blades that arbitrarily fly around the target while cutting up enemies with forces. It can be said that Dancing Blades is useless in a labyrinth, but it shows matchless power if the opponents are goblins.

"Houya, Lua."

Lua is smiling weakly hearing my call. Her beautiful transparent green hair has been dirtied with goblins' blood in spots. Still, I'm glad that she's alive.
Houya's explosion magic mowed down several dozens of goblins who had tried to crushingly surround them to death. Even so, there are still hundreds of goblins in front of us.

"■■■ ■ ■■■■■■■■■"

I begin chanting the highest order of nature magic. I've only ever used this

when I fought a Lesser Dragon in my life. It's wasteful using this on goblins, but this is the best magic to safely defeat large number of enemies.

"■■■ ■ ■■■■■■■■ ■■■"

What cruelty! Lua has lost her left arm. It could be said that this is a world's loss as her lute playing tones can't be heard anymore.

"■■■ ■ ■■■■ Wild Dancing of Void Spears <<Multiple Javelins>>"

Unseen spears are pouring unto the enemies like downpour. Amidst Dohar who's cutting up the enemies and without injuring Houya and the others, it changes hundreds of goblins into corpses.

I've not only saved Houya and Lua. Beautiful Lua has protected my distant nephew, Yusalatouya, on her back even while losing one of her arm. The young Yuya is unconscious but I give him an emergency treatment and carry him and Lua together with self-propelled stretcher <<Floating Stretcher>>.

◇

After we've returned, we immediately look for a high-ranking Garleon priest, and ask him to use healing magic. Unfortunately, the recovery for Lua's left arm didn't go well. Until I complete an artificial arm indistinguishable with the real one in the future, Lua must bear through the hardship.

Giril found cold body of Houya on the next day, he most likely felt responsible for the disaster, letting the guilt got into him.

I bring Lua and Yuya back to Bornean forest, taking the blame, two-third of the congress is in agreement to exile me.
Even though I've been away from the forest for a long time, it's sad to be chased away from your hometown. However, the lost of many young people

will result in generations without children for dozens, or even hundreds of years. It might be a fitting punishment for someone who has created this racial crisis like me.

As a sole atonement, I will create a pseudo-labyrinth for the sake of elves' growth without the danger like in this disaster. I vow to dedicate my life to build a place for training without the danger of losing lives, for the future of young elves.
I dream of bustling figures of young elves who devote themselves with studying in my maze, someday.
And, I believe in the future where the elves lead the world again.

I am Trazayuya Bornean. One foolish elf man who had scattered the lives of many young lives.

Even so, I cannot abandon my dream.

Intermission: Tama

Wagahai is Tama *de Aru*[1], the name given by master.

Tama has a family nyan.
A really strong and kind master, and Pochi who's like a little sister and Liza who's like a mother. And also cheeky Arisa and docile Lulu. Everyone is not a cat-person, but they're all important family nyan.

Arisa said that if I use, "Nyan", master will be happy, but it's a lie. Far from being happy, he's worried instead.

"Okay~ Here we go~. Everyone, follow me~."

Arisa is leading the way while running. Today is a shopping day.
New clothes! Fluttering and fluffy, cute clothes with no weird smell.

"If Pochi was to wear this clothes then Tama would be cool with this sharp one I guess?"
"This ribbon is better~?"

Not the one that Arisa recommends, but the matching one with Pochi with a small ribbon attached is what I want.

"Ara? That's unexpected, you like cute things huh~."

I don't know how to use money, so it's Arisa who buys it.

After the shopping is over, we eat a lot and lot of meats with the leftover money. I am very happy.
We pass by a park, I see a nice sunny spot for napping, then I notice master there.

"Master~?"

I run to him to talk, he looks in pain somewhere.

Pochi who runs with me together looks worried too.

"Tummy hurt~?"
"I'm alright, I might be tired though."

Master says so while patting my head. I want to be patted more, I rub my head against master's hand.

◇

The outside! I'm going outside the city for the first time.
Arisa asks, "Didn't you live outside the city when you were small?", but I only remember the winter chill and the warmth of someone's fur.
Alhough I clearly remember the time when I met Pochi, I don't really remember past things.

Pochi wasn't able to speak words and just groaned with, "Gururu~", but I worked hard to teach her words. Since I'm the *onee-chan*.

The wagon is shaking here and there, it's fun. Since Arisa and Lulu cry their butts hurt, I ask, "Are you okay~?". Arisa screams back, "Nothing is impossible with human's intelligence!", but I don't really understand the meaning. Arisa's words are fun, but I always don't understand them. She's a strange child.

Arisa teaches me many things. [Janken], [Guppa], [Hopping], [Card play], [Anisong], a lot, lots of things.
Next time, if I catch a prey, I'll give it to Arisa.

The scenery is flowing while I'm sitting beside master, it's fun. Pochi also sits beside master on the other side.

"Nya!"

Just now, a prey is in that thicket!
I tried to jump out, but Liza gripped my girdle so I wasn't able to jump out.
Too bad.

The wagon shakes and Arisa complains. Even though wagons are for shaking things, Arisa is really strange.
Pochi counterattacks Arisa who rides on her head. Uu~ I want to join in. But, I'm the *onee-chan* so I'll endure. Uu~, endure... impossble nyan♪

I play with Pochi and Arisa until Liza stops us.

◇

Uu~, I catch glimpse of many preys.
But, until master has ordered me, endure it, endure.

"Private Pochi! Private Tama!"
"Ay!"
"Yes nanodesu!"

I take on the pose Arisa has taught yesterday, "Swoosh!", and answer master.

"I will assign you two a mission! Check the security around the perimeter of the boulders!"
"Ay!""Desu!"

I chase after a rabbit that I've had my eyes on since earlier with Pochi.

The rabbit is hopping around with, "Pyon pyon"-like sound.
Pochi and me are running together.

It's slower than monsters nyan.

I throw myself.

Pyon pyon.

Nyau, it ran away.

Pyo~n.

Pochi jumps on it.

The rabbit twists its body and slips underneath Pochi.

I won't let you run!

Tou!

But the rabbit dives into a hole hidden in the grass' shadow.
Uu~, if I go there, the clothes given by master will be dirtied.

However, Pochi plunges into the hole without hesitation.
I'm the *onee-chan* after all, I'll give this rabbit to Pochi.

I catch a snake loitering around under the rock. It's a snake with no poison and delicious.
But, it's a bit small. I look for the next prey while twirling my tail around, and come across Arisa who's looking for firewoods.

"Arisa~?"
"Ara, Tama. Hmm? What are you holding?"
"Snake~"

That's right, let's give it to Arisa.
It's a bit small, but it's good for snacks.

"For you~?"
"Wa, no, don't come here."
"Not poison~?"

Even though it's not a snake with poison, so it's fine.
Now, Arisa, go ahead and chew it from the head without reserve.

"Wa, toss it away."
"Pow~?"
"Yes, turn around. spin and spin~, then throw it with a pow."
"Ay~."

As Arisa says, I spin and spin~ and throw it.
Seems that it's a new play, but I don't understand the fun.

"Yes, that's good."

Arisa crosses her arms and nods with, uh-huh. Seems it was correct.
Arisa pick a firewood on her foot and go back to master.

Next, for the sake of master, I'll look for a bigger prey.

I chase after a dragonfly.

I chase after a cricket.

I found it.

Conceal myself~, tou!

I pin the prey from behind, and it faints just from that.

Weak~?

Even though it's a present for master, but I'm told, "Let it go."
Even though, it's a big prey~.

But, it's an order from master, Tama will listen to what he says.
I spin and spin~ like Arisa taught me and toss it away.

I was scolded by master.

I must tell Arisa that it's bad to lie.
Because I'm the *onee-chan*.

1. TLN: This is impossible to tl for me without losing the humor. Dearu is like nanodesu, no particular meaning and definitely not her name. :p Apparently the author is referencing to a famous Japanese work http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Am_a_Cat

Intermission: The Work of Manager-san

<Author's Note: From the point of view of the worker's guild elf manager.>

My name is Yusala Touya, an elf who was born in Bornean forest.

"Manager, the preparation is complete."

The one who calls me is the sole employee of my shop, the small Nadi.
Although she wasn't even as tall as my knee when I first met her, she's grown taller than me before I knew it.
Human grows fast.

"Let's go."

She answers me with an energetic, "Yes!", and carries the big rucksack below her feet on her shoulder.
She presents another medium-sized rucksack below her to me while smiling.
That's my share of luggage huh.

"Laborer."
"We can't. We don't have extra money for that."

I tried to tell her that I wanted to hire a laborer to carry the luggage, but it was rejected. Since she's in charge of the shop's accounting, I can't push it too much.

It can't be helped, I put my favorite staff in the rucksack, and shoulder it.

"I've put manager's favorite dried fig in the bento, so let's do this energetically!"

Hou, it's quite rare for the economical Nadi to look out for others.
My lips gets slightly loose. Since the sharp-sighted Nadi grins when she quickly sees it, I tighten it hard.

◇

"Let's enter the mountain from around this area."

Nadi says so while showing the map to me.
We tie the horses that we rode here on trees. Just in case, I sprinkle medicines to ward monsters around them.

We're in the middle of a job from a merchant boy called Satou to deliver an item for the ashgrey ratkin people who live on an undeveloped land deep in the mountain.
Normally, I wouldn't take such annoying job, but since he's taking care a girl from my race, I couldn't decline it.
Rather than saying I cannot decline, normally I should've taken this job free of charge.
But a good-hearted person he is, he requested the job formally. Moreover, he gave three gold coins
as the payment. I wanted to tell that I didn't need the money, but Nadi quickly blocked my mouth and I was stopped.

"Manager?"
"Sorry."

I lost in thought for a bit.

"Then, please."
"Umu."

I use the secret art for walking in the forest.

"■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■■■ Wood Walk"

Green aura wraps Nadi and me.
It's been awhile since I use this magic.

While we're advancing through the forest in these states, branches and weeds as tall as grown man avert themselves from us.

"This magic is really amazing, no matter how many time I see it."
"Is that so."

I feel slightly embarrassed from Nadi's straight praise.
As a nihilistic grown man, I have to remain expressionless.
I guide Nadi while we continue advancing the mountain path. Since obstacles are avoiding themselves from us, it's no different than walking in a highway.

"Ah, that's the firefly lily of the valley flower!"
"We can't."

Yes, while we're using this magic, we cannot hurt creatures of the forest.
Once we do, the magic won't be usable for a season.

"So it's like that, aah, even though we could get five gold coins from the alchemy shop with that flower."

I lead Nadi who keeps staring at the flower in regret by hand, and advance ahead.
I wonder if there was a big monster that passed here, I catch sights of rocks and trees that are gouged unnaturally. Did some kind of high level monster have settled down in this forest?

I was going to use magic to check it, but then I noticed that my hand was still joined with Nadi's. I want to separate our hands, but she doesn't let it go.

"Nadi?"
"Err, there, it's separated."

It's rare for the intelligent her. She's really interested with the flower before is she.
I'm worried with her condition, but I have to confirm the safety first.

"■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■ ■■ Forest Whisper <<Natural Whisper>>"

The magic spreads through the forest.

『Did some new monster spring up in the forest?』
『Yes, a lot.』
『They're no more.』
『No more.』
『Hero.』
『Was here.』
『Night.』
『Running.』
『Flying.』
『Exterminated the great wild boar.』

The forest little echoes continue to echo.
A hero in such remote forest? There should be some rumor if it was the Saga empire hero, but maybe a hero appeared among the ashgrey ratkin?
I'm slightly interested with it, but since it doesn't seem to be a monster, there's probably no danger.

◇

We finally arrive at the ratkin settlements in the noon, but unfortunately, looks like we're not really welcomed.

The problem is I don't understand their words. Since I'm told that they saved Mia, I thought that they can speak elf language, but my expectation is off.

"How about it?"

"Yes, it's similar to weaselkin language. There are also some that are similar with elf language."

Nadi is speaking in guess while grabbing the cuff of my clothes.
Although I've heard that she's good with language, to be able to interact using unfamiliar language like this, she's truly capable.

I'd like to use the nature magic [Translate] that my granduncle used but I don't have it, it's impossible with my level.

I watch over Nadi who's negotiating.
In the worst case, we might have to push them the memento at least and go back.

The surrounding ratkin people become slightly noisier. Did Nadi make wrong expressions?

Un? My feet is being shaken.
When I look down, the ratkin little children are coiling around the luggage that Nadi and me have put on the ground. Since their noses are twitching, are they smelling something good?

I slowly squat down while being careful as to not stimulate the surrounding and open the big rucksack.
Strong smell spread. This bundle have croquettes huh.
Apparently, the children are interested with this smell. I don't know what's so good with this oily thing, but it's also popular in the city.
Nadi probably has brought it for her lunch, but let's use these to build friendship with them.
There are 10 croquettes in the bundle. There are 18 children huh.
I break the croquettes in half, and share it with the children.

When that happen, several ratkins who look like the mothers appear from the gap between the soldiers, and each of them carries 3-4 children who keep on chewing the croquettes to behind the men.
I give the last one to the ratkin who look here so wistfully. I saw a slightly appealing glance from Nadi. I'll divide you the dried fig later, so don't get

mad.

I don't know if the croquettes succeed as the go-between, but since a ratkin that seem to be the patriarch who understand Shiga kingdom language comes, the goal is complete somehow.

◇

"I see, so my brother has died."
"According to the person who was present on his last moment, it was a heroic death."

The patriarch says so as he holds the red helmet from among the memento I've handed. I can feel deep sorrow dwelling on his words.
When I was about to say thanks for saving Mia, and farewell, Nadi cuts in.

"Patriarch-san, why is only the forest around here dying?"
"I don't know the reason, but they've begun to wither since half a year ago."

I see, I understand what Nadi is trying to say. It's not enough with just thank you words.
I go out of the patriarch's straw-thatched roof tree house, and use a magic.

"■■ ■·····■ ■ ■ ■■■■■ Summon Forest Maiden (Summon Dryad)"

In accordance to my spell, the spirit of this mountain forest responds.
It looks like a little girl with green hair.

"I have something to ask."
"Elf! It's been awhile."
"Mountain forest."
"Do you want to know why the mountain dies?"
"That's right."

"The reason why the mountain die is~ because a human tried to forcibly operate the ruin."

According to the Dryad's story, it looks like it's because granduncle Touya's ruin has absorbed the earth veins around here. How can that be.

"Measures."
"It's alright. The ruin has stopped anyway, and I've taken a lot of mana from a cute child."

Due to the stimulation of that mana, it looks like she's succeeded in drawing power from far away earth veins.
Even though she looks like that, she's lived for a lot longer than me.

"Thank you very much."
"It's fine~, see ya."

The dryad went to the other side of the summoning circle while saying that.
It's already been resolved.

Since I talked with the dryad in elf language, I tell the content of the conversation to the patriarch and Nadi.
I wonder if my story is difficult, Nadi somehow interprets it for the patriarch.

"Oooh, the village is saved."
"I'm glad for you patriarch-san."
"Yes, we won't have to move to a different mountain now."

The patriarch firmly grabs my hand, and says thanks many times over.
Even though I did nothing.

"Isn't it because you use magic to identify the cause, and report that it's fine already right."
"Is that so."

Now then, the job is over.

I want to go back to the city, and take a nap on the usual sofa.

Intermission: Young Merchant and Orphanage Children

When I went to an orphanage on an errand of my employer, I saw little children playing cards. Those cards are exactly like the learning cards that I've made. However, the designs are slightly different.

"Hey, you guys, where did you get those cards?"
"Tsui-niichan made it."
"You're wrong, it was Yuni-ane who got it from her boyfriend."
"Etai-niichan drew the pictures."
"Tsui-niichan shaved the tree you know?"
"Yuni-ane taught us how to play."

The children answered my question in hoots. If you say it like that, I won't be able to hear it. Since the children began to quarrel, I arbitrated them in a hurry.
After asking for many times, I understand that, "They got the cards from the lover of the child called Yuni", "The child called Tsui supplied raw materials like wood blocks, ink, and brushes.", and "The child called Etai drew the pictures."

Since the learning card, including the prototype were bought by that merchant boy, he's probably the lover of that Yuni. The intelligent looking girl who was with her is probably Yuni.
I guess the children that he wanted to teach are this orphanage's kids huh.

That reminds me, the children said something that piqued me.

"What is the way to play?"

There's nothing like way to play for the cards I've made. You read the letter, and check the back of the card to see if you're correct, that's what the item only is.

"Like this!"
"You line them up."

"In turns."
"You guess the letter right~"
"It becomes yours."

The children speaks of in rapid succession. The "I want to tell"-thought overflow. I patiently listen to the children's words, and arrange them in my head.

You put 100 cards with the letter sides on top on the [Field], and if you can read the letter correctly to match the picture on the back, it become yours. The missed cards are sent to the [Graveyard], and if there are no more cards on the [Field], the cards on the [Graveyard] are put back on the [Field], and the play resumes. When the cards are all gone from the [Field], and the [Graveyard], the one who holds the most cards becomes [Scholar]--the winner.

"Amazing, to think of such play."
"That's right, Yuni-ane is amazing~"
"Didn't she say the amazing one was Aisa?"
"You're wrong, it's Tarisa."
"Wasn't it Maisa?"

I want to meet this child called Yuni. I ask if I can meet Yuni or the other two children.

"Yuni-ane is working."
"Tsui-niichan is also training right?"
"What about Etai-niichan?"
"In his room?"
"No, the elder said he was going to work in the field today."
"Gabo field?"
"No, he said mustard spinach."
"Then, he's at the red roof place."
"Uncle, I'll guide you there!"

U, uncle. Even though I'm still 20 years old.

While feeling hurt by the children's words, I follow them by hand.

◇

The children lead me to the place where 20 boys who are about 10 years older than the one who've lead me here are working in the fields.

The eldest-looking muscular boy looks suspiciously at me who've been guided by the children.

"Hey, nice to meet you, I'm a merchant called Neisen."
"What business does Merchant-sama want? Since the crops are the lord-sama's properties, we wont's sell it without permission y'know?"

I notice slightly sarcastic accent from his [Merchant], and [Sama]. I didn't come here to pick a fight with a child.

"It's not like that. I wanted to meet Etai-kun, and these children guided me."
"Etai is under that tree, fainting. Since he's useless, you can take him if you have some business. You kids, come here."

I thank the boy and go toward Etai-kun.
The children are caught by the boy, and got themselves to help weed the grass. While slightly waving to the children, I talk to Etai-kun.

"Etai-kun, can I talk with you for a bit?"
"...Who? Are you?"
"Nice to meet you, I'm a merchant called Neisen."
"Haa, merchant-san, what are you...."

Looks like Etai-kun isn't good with conversations.

"Actually, it's about the picture you've drawn on the learning cards."
"Those are interesting right!"

"Yup, the child who thought that play is amazing."
"Everyone plays it all night."
"Did no one quarrel?"
"Anyone who does will be made to have the last turn."
"I see, that's a good decision. However, it's hard to wait your turns with just two learning cards sets right."
"No, we have four sets now."

I wasn't able to hide my surprise. It's only been eight days since the [Learning Cards] have been sold. To only take four days to make one set!
Even though the painter whom I asked to produce the commercial cards took half a month to create one set...

"Did you draw it yourself?"
"No."

I breath a slight sigh of relief with that words. The reason was because it took several people to shorten the time. However, that thought is negated with the next words.

"I made the first two sets myself, but the other set was made with the help of other kids who were good at drawing. Thanks to that, we made one in a day."

◇

"Theo, Shual, Olio. This person has something to talk about."

Etai-kun leads me to a hut with three boys and girls. I promptly do self-introduction and get down to business.

"Can you guys draw pictures as good as Etai-kun?"
"That's right."
"Not as good as Etai-ani."
"Etai-niichan taught me~"

After each of them draws a picture, I start the talk.

"I want to employ you guys."
"I haven't properly learned the letters you know?"
"Is it my b, body?!"
"My breasts are still small, do you want to make me your mistress?"

I deny the children's off--the-mark replies, and I explain in detail.
I'm the original maker of this learning cards, and I want to spread it all over Shiga kingdom, not only in Seryuu city, so in order to make a lot of the learning cards, I'm going to employ them.

"How much will you give? Will you give one penny for one set?"
"You, that's too greedy."
"That's right, that'll become several copper coins in one month."
"How many will it become?"

The children's wages depend on their works, but the market price is around 1-2 copper coins in a month. In case of living-in, they normally don't get wages.
I tell the children who have begun to count with their fingers the answer.

"If you can make 30 sets in one month, then that'll be 30 pennies, or six coins in copper coins."
"Four of us can make 40 sets."
"Then that'll be eight copper coins. Each person gets two copper coins."
"Amazing, that's about the same as Yuni-neechan."
"It's true, amazing."
"However, do we have that much materials?"
"I wonder if we can ask Tsui-niichan~?"

The children are fast to become excited, and depressed.
I don't intend to make them work that cheap, but since I don't have the fund for the start up, I'll compensate them later for the margin.

"I will prepare the materials of course."
"Really?!"
"Then, I'll make many."
"Un, I'll work hard~"

Among the children who are in high spirit, Etai-kun alone looks gloomy.

"But, is it fine to do it without permissions from Yuni and Tsui-niichan?"
"Oh right, they're the children who have brought the card, taught the play, and suggested the cards' production aren't they."
"Un."
"Do you know where they work at? I'll go and ask them. If I can't meet them, I'll go back at midnight."

I go out of the orphanage after hearing the workplaces of Yuni-chan and Tsui-kun. Since I've acquired informal consents from Etai-kun and the other children, I'll talk about it with the remaining two children. I must respect the fellowship of the children.

◇

First, I go to the Gate Inn where Yuni-chan is working. I have to persuade the girl as she's the one who created the idea of the play. If I just put a separate manual for that play, it'll surely sell.

"Okay."

I got permission from the inn's girl to talk to Yuni during her work, and the she readily replied it. The girl is different than my expectation. She's not that intelligent-looking beautiful girl, but an extremely common girl.

"The one who thought that play isn't me. It's by my friend called Arisa."
"Where should I go to meet her?"
"She's gone to the labyrinth city."

"I see, this is troubling."
"It's alright, that Arisa would say strange things like [There is no border for play] and would give you the permission."

That girl called Arisa seems like she has a hearty personality.

Since that girl has promised to send Yuni-chan a letter when she's arrived at the labyrinth city, I ask her to write this matter for the permission in the reply letter. It's going to be an approval after the fact, but let's work hard as to prevent it becoming a dispute.
Of course I won't be breaking any law even if I use it on my own accord, but to just use other's people idea like that, it's something frowned upon among merchants. Normally, the merchant guild becomes the mediator.

When I tell Yuni-chan that I will send the reply together with her letter, she accept while looking wholeheartedly happy.

◇

Lastly, I go toward the wood processing plant where Tsui-kun is working. It's directly after the gate on the east street since it's related to woods transport.

"Okay."

I talked to him who's just taken a break, and he answered readily like Yuni-chan.
He replies while playing with the thin shaved wood wastes on his feet.

"It was originally things that Yuni brought anyway, I only got the woods since I wanted one for myself. I'd hate it if you're selling the the cards that are in the orphanage, but if you're selling newly made ones, I don't have any problem. Moreover, you're going to take Etai who's having problem getting works under your care right? It's impossible for that guy to become a soldier or a transporter after all."

He's unexpectedly quite responsible.

"I won't do anything bad to that boy Etai."
"Un, that guy is good at drawing pictures, but if you leave him alone, he'll draw until he collapses."

Tsui-kun nods that he wants me to tell him to be careful.
I should make an upper limit for the number of sets made in a month. If I don't put a limit, those children look like they'll work until they collapse.

When I see the plane and the thin shaved woods that Tsui-kun is holding, I remember certain words.

『What kind of idea are you going to make next? The demands seem to be there, it's the price afterward. Search for cheap materials, or way for cheap mass-production, the various trial-and-errors are fun right.』

I ruminate those words while staring at the wood chips.

"That's right, this is it."

I involuntarily stand up and shouts, the foremen on this place gather their eyes on me.
However, the excited me with the newly found idea doesn't mind those stares, and go negotiate with the boss-san. The thing that I've thought at this time takes form after half a year.
At this time, I thought of using the plywood made from wood chips and glue as the material for the cards, that wouldn't have happened without the great efforts and experiences of boss-san, and tsui-kun.

Learning cards that are made with latticed wood chips glued to become plywoods are worth 2 silver coins, it becomes souvenirs for people who visit this city for the labyrinth, and becomes well-known.

However, that's a story for later.

Until that, the days of making normal learning cards with wood blocks and barely scrap by to return the cost of the material continue for a while.
At this day, the best I can imagine is the figures of Etai and the others who are flustered for seeing a small bag full of copper coins at the end of the month.

Intermission: Arisa's Master

Are you stupid?
Hey, let me say it once more. Are you stupid?

Reading the atmosphere, I stop those abusive words in my chest.
The object of those words is my [Master]. That powerful enemy is acting presumptuous because he's got that much monstrous power and now, he's challenging that.

You will absolutely lose I said, I know that you have secret unique skills, but your level is only 10, you know?
No matter how great your skills are, there's no way it could overcome 4 times level difference!

Moreover, he's hiding his skills even though his level is so low. I wouldn't know what kind of secret technique you've prepared!

"I won't hesitate to turn this into a bloodbath you know?"

The monster says so while pointing his cane to my master.

"It's no good! Master, this guy is too strong."
"Trashes don't have any place to call me 'this guy'."

Yes, I'm doing my best to call for [master's] attention, but the attack is coming here. Ah, this life is going to be over here huh. I want to flirt before I die~.

◇

I still remember the day I meet him.
I was in the shaking slave carriage that had just arrived in Seryuu city. It was depressing only looking at the gloomy slaves in the carriage.

At that time, I felt a gaze from somewhere, and he was there.

Black hair.

Black pupils.

Delicate build.

And, Japanese face.

Yes, [Love], it had been a long time since I saw my right-in-the-center type after seeing only macho in this world.
Particularly, the slightly unreliable easy-to-push-round look is nice. My creative impulse is welling up. My delusional power cannot be stopped, like that.
You seem to be wearing good clothes, why don't you buy me and Lulu.

I deliberately attempted to use chantless charm magic, but the carriage went to the road's corner.

◇

To protect me, [Master] charges toward the monster.

What, what's with that speed!
I thought he had just started to step forward, but he had already slipped into the monster's bosom, driving a blow.
I've seen my country's knight leader and hero having a bout before, he's faster than the hero's rush at that time. Yup, too fast.

But, the monster shrugs off that attack like it's a breeze. The monster completes its chant just like that, and flings the appearing shadow whips towards me.

I hope it's not instant death.

While thinking that, as my last resistance, I chantlessly fire Psycho Bullet toward the shadow whip, but it doesn't work well.
I wonder why did I read the book about mind magic when I was in the castle. If it was light or fire magic, I could retaliate this monster.

However, the shadow whip doesn't reach me. My [master] moves as if he's teleporting and receives the attack with his body.
Even though he's delicate, his back looks slightly wide, and relief surfaces along with anger in me.

Why are you acting so rash!

◇

The next time I met him was several days after. I remember the surrounding was noisy because the missing slave trader had came back.

Since a good customer is here, the expensive girls that would likely sells were to be shown in turns. Apparently the opponent was quite formidable, 10 girls had dejectedly returned.
And then, it's our turn, the six unpopular ones. If the girls before weren't selling, there's no way we would, curse.

And the one who's sitting in the sofa inside the tent is him. He's with three beast kin girls behind. Alright, I'll get his favor!

Nidoren, the slave trader, is saying something, but right now I'm putting power to my eyes!

But, the appeal from this beauty doesn't reach him, he almost leaves from the place. I become panicked and try to appeal with words. Fufufu, receive this appeal attack from me who's accustomed with job-hunting!

However, he's tough.
Even after I explain the merit and convey my feeling, he's completely unwavering.
Can't be helped, I'll use my last resort. I won't let this chance pass, even if it means I have to use heartless means!

Get shaken with chantless, [Charm Person], and [Fret].

Huh~? It's not working.

The magic finally works after I use my trump card, Never Give up.
Who is this person?
His name is Satou, and his face looks Japanese, he must be a transported person right?

Well, let's be happy with this for now.
Fuffuffu, I won't let you sleep tonight.

◇

Something that looks like a joke is happening in front of my eyes.
Is he really a human? He grasp the supposedly untouchable magic restraints with his hands and tries to do something about it.

"It's hard to grasp even though it doesn't have reaction, this stupid <<fantasy>> things."

He really get away from the restraint even while complaining.
No no, you can't normally do that.

"What is your purpose?"

Mou, forget about purpose.

First of all, we should get away from here in order to live.

It's too bad, but let's give up on Mia.
Mia, I'm sorry. You can resent me however much. I'm helpless with my power.

"Do you have grudges with heroes?"
"Way off the mark."

The discussion breaks off, a lot of shadow whips are coming from under the monster's feet and go towards Mia.
He takes out two handguns from his pocket and shoots down the shadow whips.

Oh!　Cool~
Why doesn't this world have digital camera!

I'm having an out-of-place thought to escape from the stress from this hopeless situation.

◇

I've played a petty trick during our contract ceremony. I've mixed, [You can approach me day and night.] With this, as long as master doesn't seriously order against it, it won't be considered a violation of contract.

I'm clever~♪　Arisa-chan great victory.

On the way back to the inn, interesting things keep piling up.

Itadakimasu?

Protein?

This person really is Satou-san huh?

Let's put aside such trivial things.

No matter what happen, tonight is my first night!
I haven't had first night in my previous life!
I'll fully demonstrate you my net knowledge, boy!

I enter the inn room while feeling excited.

We're in the same room.
I understand, boy. A 15 years old is at his peak of wanting it!

"Arisa and Lulu, you two can use that bed."

Does he want to attack us as set?
Lulu is pure, if possible, I want her to have normal loving one.

I was waiting for his attack, 'is it now', 'or now', but he was sleeping on the next bed.

IM-POS-SI-BLE!

I put Lulu to sleep with mind magic and crawl into master's bed.
I feel sorry, but I don't have any regret.

The result was utter failure, but turned out he really is a Japanese.
I don't know if he's a reincarnated or transported, but with that Japanese face, he's probably a transported one. Can't be sure with Lulu here though.

◇

"Arisa! When morning comes, go ask for assistance at the worker's guild manager."

Uwaah~, stupid stupid stupid.
I frantically jump to him who is sinking together with Mia into shadow portal.

But, I didn't reach him.
The shadows that come out slip and graze me.

"Arisa, let's take care of those for now."

Liza plunges toward three shadow stalkers alone.
Doing such reckless attack, even the usually calm Liza is greatly shaken.

While I fight the shadow stalkers with chantless shock wave, Pochi, Tama and Liza are supporting me.

Liza got hurt, but we somehow won.
I give Liza first-aid with the help of my previous life's memory, while Pochi and Tama are preparing the wagon.

I wanted to have Lulu to drive the wagon, but since she can't see well in the darkness, it'd be dangerous so I leave it to Liza and Tama.

"Master is alright nanodesu?"
"Come back~?"

I want to know that too!
But, as an adult woman I can't possibly slap nervous little girls.

"Of course, he' s alright. He's our master remember. Of course he's coming back!"

I declare so while convincing myself midway.
I won't ask him to be in one piece, but at least please come back alive!

◇

When we're waiting for the gate of Seryuu city to open, Tama begins making noise.

"Re~?"
"What's wrong nodesu."
"Master, there~!"

What did you say!

"Is that true, Tama!"

I press toward Tama.
Whoops, the wagon suddenly moves and I fall down.
Although she wasn't complaining before, Liza's eyes are looking very desperate.
This girl might be unexpectedly the most worried.

"He's there desu!"
"Sama~."
"Yeah, master. ...He's safe.

Pochi, and Tama, then Liza who has became emotional is choking her words.
Hey wait, where is he?

"Arisa, there. At hill on the road ahead, in white clothes."

He's there!
What are you doing so nonchalantly waving here.

"...I, I was worried! Mou, promise me to never do something that absurd ever again!!"

I shout and cry on his chest.

He's apologizing so many, many times, but he absolutely doesn't understand.

I will become strong.
To protect this stupid and reckless [Master] from jumping into dangerous situation!

I am Arisa.
Former Japanese, Tachibana Arisha
My love story won't lose to this absurd parallel world (fantasy)!